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GUY LIVINGSTONE

OR

'THOROUGH'

BY THE AUTHOR OF

"SWORD AND GOWN"

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SWORD AND GOWN.

GUY LIVINGSTONE.

GUY LIVINGSTONE.

CHAPTER I.

Neque imbellem feroces
Progenerant aquilæ columbam.

It is not a pleasant epoch in one's life—the first forty eight hours at a large public school. I have known strong-minded men of mature age confess that they never thought of it without a shiver. I don't count the home-sickness, which perhaps only affects, seriously, the most innocent of *débutants*, but there are other thousand-and-one little annoyances which make up a great trouble. If there were nothing else, for instance, the unceasing query, 'What's your name?' makes you feel the possession of a cognomen at all a serious burden and bar to advancement in life.

A dull afternoon, towards the end of October; the sky a neutral tint of ashy grey; a bitter north-east wind tearing down the yellow leaves from the old elms that girdle the school-close of ——; a foul clinging paste of mud and trampled grass-blades under foot, that chilled you to the marrow; a mob of two hundred lower-boys, vicious with cold and the enforcement of keeping goal through the first foot-ball match of the season—in the midst, I, who speak to you, feeling myself in an eminently false position—there's the *mise en scène.*

My small persecutors had surrounded me, but had hardly time to settle well to their work, when one of the players came by and stopped for an instant to see what was going on. The match had not yet begun.

There was nothing which interested him much apparently, for he was passing on, when my despondent answer to the everlasting question caught his ear. He turned round then—

'Any relation to Hammond of Holt?'

I replied, meekly but rather more cheerfully, that he was my uncle.

'I know him very well,' the new comer said. 'Don't bully him more than you can help, you fellows; I'll wait for you after calling over, Hammond. I should like to ask you about the squire.'

He had no time to say more, for just then the ball was kicked off, and the battle began. I saw him afterwards often during that afternoon, always in the front of the rush, or the thick of the scrimmage, and I saw, too, more than one player limp out of his path disconsolately, trying vainly to dissemble the pain of a vicious 'hack.'

I'll try to sketch Guy Livingstone, as he appeared to me then, at our first meeting.

He was about fifteen, but looked fully a year older, not only from his height, but from a disproportionate length of limb and development of muscle, which ripened later into the rarest union of activity and strength that I have ever known. His features were very dark and pale, too strongly marked to be called handsome; about the lips and lower jaw especially there was a set sternness that one seldom sees before the beard is grown. The eyes were very dark grey, nearly black, and so deeply set under the thick eyebrows that they looked smaller than they really were; and I remember, even at that early age, their expression, when angered, was anything but pleasant to meet. His dress was well adapted for displaying his deep square chest and sinewy arms—a close-fitting jersey, and white trousers girt by a broad black belt; the cap, orange velvet, fronted with a silver Maltese cross.

The few words he had spoken worked an immediate change in my favour. I heard one of my tormentors say, not without awe—'The Count knows his people at home;' and they not only left me in peace, but, a little later, some of them began to tell me of a recent exploit of Guy's, which had raised him high in their simple hero-worship, and which, I dare say, is still enumerated among the feats of the brave days of old, by the fags over their evening small-beer.

To appreciate it, you must understand that the highest form in the school—the Sixth—were regarded by the fags, and other subordinate classes, with an inexpressible reverence and terror. They were considered as exempt from the common frailties of schoolboy nature: no one ventured to fix a limit to their power. Like the Gods of the Lotus-eater, they lay beside their nectar, rarely communing with ordinary mortals except to give an order, or set a punishment. On the form immediately below them part of their glory was reflected; these were a sort of ἡμίθεοι, awaiting their translation into the higher Olympus of perfected omnipotence.

In this intermediate state flourished, at the time I speak of, one Joseph Baines, a fat, small-eyed youth, with immense pendent pallid cheeks, rejoicing in the *sobriquet* of 'Buttons'—his father being eminent in that line in the Midland Metropolis. The son was Brummagem to the back-bone. He was intensely stupid; but, having been a fixture at —— beyond the memory of the oldest inhabitant, he had slowly gravitated on into his present position, on the old Ring principle—'weight must tell.' I believe he had been bullied continuously for many years, and now, with a dull pertinacious malignity, was biding his time, intending, on his accession to power, to inflict full reprisals on those below him; or, in his own expressive language, 'to take it out of 'em, like smoke.' He was keeping his hand in by the perpetration of small tyrannies on all whom he was not afraid to meddle with; but, hitherto, from a lingering suspicion, perhaps, that it was not quite safe, he had never annoyed Livingstone.

It was on a Saturday night, the hebdomadal Saturnalia, when the week's work was over, and no one had anything to do; the heart of Joseph was jocund with pork-chops and mulled beer, and, his evil genius tempting him, he proposed to three of his intimates 'to go and give the Count a turn.' Nearly every one had a nickname, and this had been given to Guy, partly, I think, from his haughty demeanour, partly from a prevalent idea that this German dignity was dormant somewhere in his family. When the *quartette* entered, Guy knew perfectly what they came for, but he sat quite still and silent, while two of them held him down by the arms in his chair.

'I think you'd look very well with a cross on, Count,' Baines said; 'so keep steady while we decorate you.'

As he spoke he was mixing up a paste with tallow and candle-snuff, and, when it was ready, came near to daub the cross on Livingstone's forehead.

The two who held him had been quite deceived by his unexpected tranquillity, and had somewhat relaxed their gripe as they leant forward to witness the operation; but the fourth, standing idle, saw all at once the pupils of his eyes contract, and his lips set so ominously, that the words were in his mouth—'Hold him fast!' when Guy, exerting the full force of his arms, shook himself clear; and grasping a brass candlestick within his reach, struck the executioner straight between the eyes. The effort of freeing himself to some extent broke the force of the blow, or the great Baines dynasty might have ended there and then; as it was, Buttons fell like a log, and, rolling once over on his face, lay there bleeding and motionless.

While the assistants were too much astounded to detain him, Guy walked out without a glance at his prostrate enemy; and going straight to the head of the house, told him what had happened. The character of the aggressor was so well known, that, when they found he was not seriously hurt, they let Guy off easy with 'two books of the *Iliad* to write out in Greek.' Buttons kept the sick-room for ten days, and came out looking more pasty than ever, with his pleasant propensities decidedly checked for the time.

In his parish church at Birmingham—two tons of marble weighing him down—the old button-maker sleeps with his father (to pluralize his ancestors would be a grave historical error), and Joseph II. reigns in his stead; exercising, I doubt not, over his factorypeople the same ingenuity of torture, which, in old times, nearly drove the fags to rebellion. He is a Demosthenes, they say, at vestries, and a Draco at the Board of Guardians; but in the centre of his broad face, marring the platitude of its smooth-shaven respectability, still burns angrily a dark red scar—Guy's sign-manual—which he will carry to his grave.

The exultation of the lower school over this exploit was boundless. Fifty energetic admirers contended for the honour of writing out the punishment inflicted on the avenger; and one sentimentalist, just in Herodotus, preserved the fatal candlestick as an inestimable relic, wreathing its stem with laurel and myrtle, in imitation of the honours paid by Athens to the sword that slew the Pisistratid.

CHAPTER II.

My only books
Were woman's looks,
And folly all they taught me.

The Count bore his honours very calmly, though every week some fresh feat of bodily strength or daring kept adding to his popularity. It was no slight temptation to his vanity; for, as some one has said truly, no successful adventurer in after-life ever wins such undivided admiration and hearty partisans as a school hero. The *prestige* of the Liberator among the Irish peasantry comes nearest to it, I think; or the feeling of a clan, a hundred years ago, towards their chief. It must be very pleasant to be quoted so incessantly and believed in so implicitly, and to know that your decisions are so absolutely without appeal. From that first day when he interfered in my favour, Guy never ceased to accord me the ægis of his protection, and it served me well; for, then as now, I was strong neither in body nor nerve. Yet our tastes, save in one respect, were as dissimilar as can be imagined. The solitary conformity was, that we were both, in a desultory way, fond of reading, and our favourite books were the same. Neither would do more school work than was absolutely necessary, but at light literature of a certain class we read hard.

I don't think Guy's was what is usually called a poetical temperament; for his taste in this line was quite one-sided. He was no admirer of the picturesque, certainly. I have heard him say that his idea of a country to live in was, where there was no hill steep enough to wind a horse in good condition, and no wood that hounds could not run through in fifteen minutes; therein following the fancy of that eminent French philosopher, who, being invited to climb Ben Lomond to enjoy the most magnificent of views, responded meekly—'*Aimez-vous les beautés de la Nature? Pour moi, je les abhorre.*' Can you not fancy the strident emphasis on the last syllable, revealing how often the poor materialist had been victimized before he made a stand at last?

All through Livingstone's life the real was to predominate over the ideal; and so it was at this period of it. He had a great dislike to purely sentimental or descriptive poetry; preferring to all others those battle-ballads, like the *Lays of Rome,* which stir the blood like a trumpet, or those love-songs which heat it like rough strong wine.

He was very fond of Homer, too. He liked the diapason of those sonorous hexameters, that roll on, sinking and swelling with the ebb and flow of a stormy sea. I hear his voice—deep-toned and powerful even at that early age—finishing the story of Poseidon and his beautiful prize—their bridal-bed laid in the hollow of a curling wave—

> *Πορφύρεον δ' ἄρα κῦμα περιστάθη, οὔρεϊ ἴσον,*
> *Κυρτωθὲν, κρύψεν δὲ Θεὸν θνητήν τε γυναῖκα.*

And yet they say that the glorious old Sciote was a mythe, and the Odyssey a magazine worked out by clever contributors. They might as well assert that all his marshals would have made up one Napoleon.

I remember how we used to pass in review the beauties of old time, for whom 'many drew swords and died,' whose charms convulsed kingdoms and ruined cities, who called the stars after their own names.

Ah, Gyneth and Ida! peerless queens of beauty—it was exciting, doubtless, to gaze down from your velveted gallery on the mad tilting below, to see ever and anon through the yellow dust a kind handsome face looking up at you, pale but scarcely reproachful, just before the horse-hoofs trod it down; ah, fairest Ninons and Dianas;—prizes that, like the Whip at Newmarket, were always to be challenged for—you were proud when your reckless lover came to woo, with the blood of last night's favourite not dry on his blade; but what were your fatal honours, compared to those of a reigning toast in the rough ancient days?

The demigods and heroes that were suitors did not stand upon trifles; and the contest often ended in the extermination of all the lady's male relatives to the third and fourth generation. People then took it quite as a matter of course—rather a credit to the family than otherwise.

Guy and I discussed, often and gravely, the relative merits of Evadne the violet-haired, Helen, Cleopatra, and a hundred others, just as, on the steps of White's, or in the smoking-room at the 'Rag,' men compare the points of the *débutantes* of the season.

His knowledge of feminine psychology—it *must* have been theoretical, for he was not seventeen—implied a study and depth of research that was quite surprising; but I am bound to state that his estimate of the strength of character and principle inherent in the weaker sex, was anything but high; nearly indeed identical with that formed by the learned lady who, to the question, 'Did she think the virtue of any one of her sisterhood impregnable?' replied '*C'est selon.*' He often used to astonish my weak mind by his observations on this head. I did not know till afterwards, that Sir Henry Fallowfield, the Bassompierre of his day, came for the Christmas pheasant-shooting every year into Guy's neighbourhood, and that he had already imbibed lessons of questionable morality, sitting at the gouty feet of that evil Gamaliel.

He spoke of and to women of every class readily, whenever he got the chance; always with perfect *aplomb* and self-possession, and I have heard older men remark since, that in him it did not appear the precocity of ‘the rising generation,’ but rather the confidence of one who knew his subject well. Perhaps the fact of his father having died when he was an infant, and his having always been suzerain among his women at home, may have had something to do with this. An absurd instance of what I have been saying happened just before Guy left.

By time-honoured custom, four or five of the Sixth were invited every week to dine with the head-master. They were not, strictly speaking, convivial, those solemn banquets; where the host was condescendingly affable, and his guests cheerful, as it were, under protest; resembling somewhat the entertainments in the captain's cabin, where the chief is unpopular.

Our Archididascalus was a kind-hearted honest man, albeit by virtue of his office somewhat strict and stern. You could read the *Categories* in the wrinkles of his colourless face, and contested passages of Thucydides in the crows-feet round his eyes. The everlasting grind at the educational treadmill had worn away all he might once have had of imagination ; he translated with precisely the same intonations the Tusculan *Disputations* and—Ἔρως *ἀνίκατε μάχαν.*

He had lately taken to himself a wife, his junior by a score of years. The academic atmosphere had not had time then to freeze her into the dignity befitting her position; when I met her, ten years later, she was steady and staid enough, poor thing! to have been the wife of Grotius.

Guy sat next to her that evening, and before the first course was over a decided flirtation was established. The pretty hostess, albeit wife of a doctor and daughter of a dean, had evidently a strong coquettish element in her composition, and a very slight spark was sufficient to relight the *veteris vestigia flammæ.*

For some time her husband did not seem to realize the position; but gradually his sentences grew rare and curt; he opened his mouth, no longer to let fall the pearls of his wisdom, but to stop it with savoury meat; finally this last resource failed, and he sat, looking wrathfully but helplessly on the proceedings at the other end of the table—a lamentable instance of prostrated ecclesiastical dignity. His disgust, however, was far exceeded by the horror of one of the party, a meek cadaverous-looking boy, whose parents lived in the town, and who was wont to regard the head-master as the vicegerent of all powers, civil and sacerdotal—I am not sure he did not include military as well. I caught him looking several times at the door and the ceiling with a pale guilty face, as if he expected some immediate visitation to punish the sacrilege. However, Heaven, which did not interrupt the feast of Atreus, or of Tereus (till the dessert), allowed us to finish our dinner in peace. During the interval, when we sat alone over his claret, our host revived a little; but utterly relapsed in the drawing-room, where things went on worse than ever. Guy leant over the fair Penelope (such was her classical and not inappropriate name) while she was singing, and over her sofa afterwards, evidently considering himself her legitimate proprietor for the time, and regarding the husband, as he hovered round them, in the light of an unauthorized intruder. The latter would have given anything, once or twice, to have interfered, I am sure; but, apart from the extreme ridicule of the thing, he was in his own house, and as hospitable as Saladin.

It was a great scene, when, at parting, she gave Guy the camellia that she wore at her breast; the Doctor gasped thrice convulsively and said no word; but I wonder how she accounted afterwards for the smile and blush which answered some whispered thanks? There are certain limits that even the historian dares not transgress; a veil falls between the profane and the thalamus of an LL.D.; but, I rather imagine, she had a hard time of it that night, the poor little woman! Let us hope, in charity, that she held her own.

When the Count was questioned as to the conversation that had passed, he declined to give any particulars, merely remarking, that 'he had to thank Dr —— for a very pleasant evening, and he hoped every one had enjoyed themselves very much,'—which was philanthropic, to say the least of it.

I don't know if it was our imagination, but we fancied that when the head-master called up Livingstone, in form, after this, he did so with an air of grave defiance, such as a duellist of the Old Régime may have worn, when, doffing his plumed hat, he said to his adversary, '*En garde!*'

There was little time to make observations, for shortly afterward Guy went up to Oxford, whither, six months later, I followed him.

CHAPTER III.

Through many an hour of summer suns,
By many pleasant ways,
Like Hezekiah's, backward runs
The shadow of my days.

When I came up, I found Guy quite established and at home. He was a general favourite with all the men he knew at college, though intimate with but very few. There was but one individual who hated him thoroughly, and I think the feeling was mutual—the senior tutor, a flaccid being, with a hand that felt like a fish two days out of water, a large nose, and a perpetual cold in his head. He consistently and impartially disbelieved every one on their word, requiring material proof of each assertion ; an original mode of acquiring the confidence of his pupils, and precluding anything like an attempt at deception on their part. I remember well a discussion on his merits that took place in the porter's lodge one night just after twelve. When several had given their opinions, more or less strongly, some one asked the gate-ward what he thought of the individual in question, to which that eminent functionary thus replied—'Why, you see, sir, I'm only a servant, and, as such, can't speak freely; but I wish he was dead, I do.'

As I have said, Livingstone disliked Selkirk heartily, and did not take the trouble to conceal it. He used to look at him sometimes with a curious expression in his eyes, which made the tutor twirl and writhe uncomfortably in his chair. The latter annoyed him as much as he possibly could, but Guy held on the even tenor of his way; seldom contravening the statutes, except in hunting three days a week, which he persisted in doing all lectures and regulations notwithstanding. He rode little under fourteen stone, even then; but the three horses he kept were well up to his weight, and he stood A 1 in Jem Hill's estimation, as 'the best heavy-weight that had come out of Oxford for many a day;' for he not only went straight as a die, but rode *to* hounds instead of *over* them. I suppose this latter practice is inherent in University sportsmen. I know, in my time, the way in which they pressed on hounds for the first two fields out of cover, or after a check, used to make the grey hairs, which were the brave old huntsman's crown of glory, stand on end with indignation and terror; so that he prayed devoutly for a big fence which, like the broken bridge at Leipsic, might prove a stopper to the pursuing army. There was the making of a good rider in many of them, too; they only wanted ballast, for they knew no more of fear than Nelson did, and would grind over the vale of the Evenlode and the Marsh Gibbon double timber as gaily and undauntedly as over the accommodating Bullingdon hurdles. And what screws they rode! ancient animals bearing as many scars as a *vieux de la vieille*, that were considered short of work if they did not come out five days a fortnight. This was Guy's favourite pursuit; but he threw off the superfluity of his animal energies in all sorts of athletics; in sparring especially he attained a rare excellence; so well known was it indeed, that he passed his first year without striking a blow in anger, through default of an antagonist, except a chance one or two exchanged in the *mêlée* which is imperative on the fifth of November.

I did not hunt much myself, for my health was far from strong, and I confess my University recollections are not lively.

After the first flush of novelty had worn off, they bored one intensely—those large wines and suppers where, night by night, a score of Nephelégeretæ sat shrouded in smoke; chanting the same equivocal ditties; drinking the same fiery liquors miscalled the juice of the grape, villanous enough to make the patriarch that planted the vine stir remorsefully in his grave under Ararat—each man all the while talking 'shop,' *à l'outrance.* The skeleton of ennui sat at these dreary feasts; and it was not even crowned with roses. I often used to wonder what the majority of my contemporaries conversed about, when in the bosom of their families, during the 'long.' They couldn't *always* have been inflicting Oxford on their miserable relatives: the weakest of human natures would have revolted against such tyranny: and yet the horizon of their ideas seemed as utterly bounded by Bagley and Headington Hill, as if the great ocean stream had flowed outside those limits. Some adventurous spirits, it is true, stretched away as far as Woodstock and Abingdon; but I doubt if they returned much improved by the grand tour.

One of their most remarkable characteristics was the invincible terror and repugnance that they appeared to entertain to the society of women of their own class. When the visitation was inevitable, it is impossible to describe the great horror that fell on these unfortunate boys. The feeling of Zanoni's pupil, as the Watcher on the Threshold came floating and creeping towards him, was nothing to it.

For example, at Commemoration—to which festival 'lions' from all quarters of the earth resorted in vast droves—when one of this class was hard hit by the charms of some fair stranger, he never thought of expressing his admiration otherwise than by piteous looks, directed at her from an immense distance, out of shot for an opera-glass; when in her immediate vicinity his motto was that of the Breton baron—*mourir muet.* Claret-cup flowed and champagne sparkled, powerless to raise him to the audacity of an avowal. Under the woods of Nuneham, in the gardens of Blenheim, amidst the crowd of the Commemoration ball, the same deep river of diffidence flowed between him and his happiness. My own idea is that, after all was over, the silent ones, like Jaques' stricken deer, used to 'go weep,' over chances lost and opportunities neglected. With waitresses at way-side inns, *et id genus omne*, they were tolerably self-possessed and reliant; though even there a 'thousand might well be stopped by three,' and I would have backed an intelligent barmaid against the field at odds: indeed, I think I have seen a security nearly allied to contempt on the fine features of a certain 'lone *star*,' as she parried—so easily!—the compliments and repartees of a dozen assailants at once, accounted, in their own quadrangles, Millamours of the darkest dye.

Guy accounted for this unfortunate peculiarity by saying that a cigar in the mouth was the normal state of many of these men; so that, when circumstances debarred them from the Havannah courage, they lost all presence of mind, and, being unable to retreat under cover of the smoke, lapsed instantly into a sullen despair, suffering themselves to be shot down unresistingly. Perhaps some future philosopher will favour us with a better solution to this important problem in physics: I know of none.

After all, the reading men did best, though we did not think so then, when we saw them creeping into morning chapel jaded and heavy-eyed, after a debauch over Herodotus or the Stagyrite. They had a purpose in view, at all events, and, I believe, were placidly content during the progress of its attainment—in the Seventh Heaven, when their hopes were crowned by a First, or even a Second. True; the pace was too good for some of the half-bred ones, and such as could not stand the training, who departed, to fade away rapidly in the old house at home, or to pine, slowly but very surely, in remote curacies.

Some of these, I fancy, must have sympathized with Madame de Staël's consumptive niece, who answered to the question, 'Why she was weeping all alone?'—'*Je me regrette.*' When, resting in their daily walk, shortened till it became a toil to reach the shady seat under the elms at the garden's end, they watched the stalwart ploughmen and drovers go striding by, without a trouble behind their tanned foreheads, except the thought that wages might fall a shilling a week—was there no envy, I wonder, as they looked down on the wan hands lying so listless across their knees? Would they not have given their First, and their fellowship in embryo to boot, to have had the morning appetite of Tom Chauntrell, the horsebreaker, after twelve pipes over-night with gin-and-water to match, or to have been able, like Joe Springett, the under-keeper, to breast the steepest brae in Cumberland with never a sob or a painful breath? Did they never murmur while thinking how brightly the blade might have flashed, how deftly have been wielded, if the worthless scabbard had only lasted out till, on some grand field-day, the word was given —'Draw swords!'? Some felt this, doubtless; but the most part, I imagine, were possessed with a comfortable assurance, that their short life had been useful if not ornamental; and so, to a certain extent, they had their reward. At any rate, their ending was to the full as glorious as that of some other friends of ours, who crawl away from the battle-ground of the *Viveurs* to die, or to linger on helpless hypochondriacs.

If I have spoken depreciatingly or unfairly of the mass of my college coevals (and it may well be so), I do full justice, in thought at least, to some brilliant exceptions. I founded friendships there which, I trust, will outlive me.

I do not forget Warrenne, too good for the men he lived with, a David in our camp of Kedar—always going on straight in the path he thought right, though ever and anon his hot Irish blood would chafe fiercely under the curb self-imposed; and labouring incessantly, with all gentleness, to induce others to follow; a Launcelot in his devotion to womankind; a Galahad in purity of thought and purpose. I have never known a man of the world so single-hearted, or a saint with so much *savoir vivre.*

I see before me now, Lovell, with his frank look and cheery laugh, the model of a stalwart English squirehood: and Petre, equal to either fortune; in reverse or success calm and impassible as Athos the mousquetaire; regarding money simply as a circulating medium, with the profoundest contempt for its actual value—*se ruinant en prince.* He edified us greatly, on one occasion, by meeting his justly offended father with a stern politeness; declining to hold any communication with him by word or letter, till he (the sire) 'could express himself in a more Christian spirit.'

Then there was Barlowe, the pearl of gentlemen-riders; the very apple of Charles Symond's eye; unspoiled by a hundred triumphs, and never degenerating into the professional, though, I believe, his idea of earthly felicity was—

A match for £50, 10st. 7lb. each. Owners up. Over 4 miles of a fair hunting country.

I see him too, with his pleasant face, round, rosy, and beardless as a child-cherub of Rubens, tempting pale men with splitting heads to throw boots at him in the bitterness of their envy, as he entered their rooms on the morning after a heavy drink; his eyes so clear and guileless that you would never gues how sharp they could be at times when a dangerous horse was coming up on his quarter. A strange compound his character was, of cool calculation and sentimental simplicity. The most astute of trainers never got the better of him in making a match; and, I am sure, to this day, he believes in ——'s poetry, and in the immutability of feminine affection.

How agreeable he was about the small hours, chirping over his grog; alternating between reminiscences of 'My tutor's daughter,' and recitals of choice morsels in verse and prose, misquoting, to the utter annihilation of rhythm and sense, but all with perfect gravity, good faith, and satisfaction.

Nec te, memorande, relinquam—true Tom Lynton!—not clever, not even high bred, but loved by every one for the honestest and kindest heart that ever was the kernel of a rough rind.

Do we not remember that supper where the Fathers of England were being discussed? Every one, drawn on by the current, had a stone to throw at his relieving officer; the complaint, of course, being a general tightness in the supplies. At last, Tom, who, though his own sire was an austere man, could not bear to hear the absent run down, broke in, gravely remonstrating—

'Well, gentlemen,' he said, 'remember they're our *fellow-creatures*, at all events.'

They drank 'Lynton and the Governors,' with a compound multiplication of cheers.

I might mention more; but a face rises just now before me, which makes me close the muster-roll—the face of one who united in himself many, very many of the best qualities of others; of one whom I shrink from naming here, lest it should seem that I do so lightly—a face that I saw six hours before its features became set for ever.

CHAPTER IV.

Δὴ τότ' ἀνασχομένω, ὁ μὲν ἤλασε δεξίον ὦμον.
'Ιρος, ὁ δ' αὐχέν' ἔλασσεν ὑπ' οὔατος, ὀστέα δ' εἴσω
῎Εθλασεν· αὐτίκα δ' ἦλθεν ἀνα στόμα φοίνιον αἶμα.

Towards the end of my second year an event came off in which we were all much interested—a steeplechase in which both Universities were to take part. The stakes were worth winning—twenty sovs. entrance, h. f., and a hundred sovs. added; besides, the *esprit de corps* was strong, and men backed their opinions pretty freely. The venue was fixed at B——; the time, the beginning of the Easter vacation.

The old town was crowded like Vanity Fair. There was a railway in progress near, and the navvies and other 'roughs' came flocking in by hundreds; so that the municipal authorities, justly apprehensive of a row, concentrated the cohorts of their police, and swore in no end of specials as a reserve.

The great event came off duly; a fair instance of the 'glorious uncertainty' which backers of horses execrate and ring-men adore. All the favourites were out of the race early. Our best man, Barlowe, the centre of many hopes, and carrying a heavy in-vestment of Oxford money, was floored at the second double post-and-rail. The Cambridge cracks, too, by divers casualties, were soon disposed of. At the last fence, an Oxford man was leading by sixty yards; but it was his maiden race, and he lost his head when he found himself looking like a winner so near home. Instead of taking the stake-and-bound at the weakest place, he rode at the strongest; his horse swerved to the gap, took the fence sideways, and came down heavily into the ditch of the winning field. The representative of Cambridge, who came next, riding a good steady hunter, not fast but safe at his fences, cantered in by himself. I remember he was so bewildered by his unexpected victory, that one of his backers had to hold him fast in the saddle, or he would have dismounted before riding to scale, and so lost the stakes.

Well, the race was over and the laurels lost, so we had nothing to do but pay and look pleasant, and then adjourn to the inevitable banquet at 'The George.' There was little to distinguish the proceedings from the routine of such festivals. The winners stood champagne, and the losers drank it—to any amount. The accidents of flood and field were discussed over and over again; and, I believe, every man of the twenty-three who had ridden that day could and did prove, to his own entire satisfaction, that he must have won but for some freak of fortune totally unavoidable, and defying human calculation. About nine o'clock I went out with another man to get some fresh air, and something I wanted in the town. At the corner of every street there was a group of heavy, sullen faces, looking viciously ready for a row; while out of the windows of the frequent public-houses gushed bursts of revelry hideously discordant, from the low-browed rooms where the wild Irish sat howling and wrangling over their liquor. However, we got what we wanted, and were returning, when, in a street on our left, we heard cries and a trampling of many feet. Two figures, looking like University men, passed us at speed, and throwing something down before us, dived into an alley opposite, and were lost to sight. My companion picked up the object; and we had just time to make out that it was a bell-handle and name-plate, when the pursuers came up—six or seven 'peelers' and specials, with a ruck of men and boys. We were collared on the instant. The fact of the property being found in our possession constituted a *flagrans delictum*—we were caught 'red-handed.' It was vain to argue that, had we been the delinquents, we should scarcely have been standing there still, awaiting discovery. The idea of arguing with a rural policeman, when, by a rare coincidence, popular feeling is with him! The mob regarded our capture, exulting like the Romans over Jugurtha in chains. It was decided 'we were to go before the Inspector.' We were placed in the centre of a phalanx of specials, each guarded by two regulars; and so the triumph, followed by a train that swelled at every turning, moved slowly along the Sacred Way towards the temple of the station-house, where the municipal Jupiter Capitolinus sat in his glory.

Before we had proceeded three hundred yards, there was a shout from the crowd, 'Look out! here come the 'Varsity!' and, down across street leading from the inn, two hundred gownsmen, wild with wrath and wassail, came leaping to the rescue.

In the van of all I caught sight of two figures—one that I knew very well, towering, bare-headed, a hand's-breadth above the throng; the other, something below the middle height, but shaggy, vast-chested, and double-jointed as a red Highland steer—McDiarmid of Trinity, glory of the Cambridge gymnasium, and '5' in the University eight. They were not shouting like the rest, but hitting out straight and remorselessly; and before these two strong Promachi, townsman and navvy, peeler and special, went down like blades of corn. Close at their shoulder I distinguished Lovell, his clear blue eyes lightening savagely; and stout Tom Lynton, a deeper flush on his honest face, hewing away with all the unscientific strength of his nervous arm.

But my two guards, very Abdiels in their duty, never let me go: on the contrary, one tightened his gripe on my throat suffocatingly; while the other, though I remained perfectly quiescent, kept giving me gentle hints to keep the peace, with the end of his staff. I was getting sick and dizzy, when something passed my cheek like the wind of a ball; there was a dull crashing sound close at my ear; the grasp on my neck relaxed all at once; I felt something across my feet, and saw a dark-blue mass, topped by the ruin of a shiny hat, lying there quite still; an arm was round my waist like the coil of a cable, and I heard Guy's voice laughing loud—

'My dear Frank!' he said, as he dragged me away towards the inn; 'the centre of a row, as usual! *Que diable allait-il faire dans cette bagarre?*'

I hardly heard him, for my senses were still confused: but in thirty seconds I was under the archway of 'The George.' As the heroines of the Radcliffe romances say, 'I turned to thank my preserver, but he was gone.'

When I recovered my breath, I went up to a balcony on the first floor and looked out. The tide of the affray was surging gradually back into the wide open space before the inn, and very shortly this was filled with a chaos of furious faces and struggling arms. The University were evidently recoiling, pressed back by the sheer weight of their opponents; but soon came a reinforcement of grooms and stable-men, light-weights, active and wiry; and these, with their hunting-crops and heavy cutting-whips used remorselessly—like Cæsar's legionaries, they struck only at the face—once more re-established the balance of the battle.

Suddenly the *mêlée* seemed to converge to one point—the mid-eddy, as it were, of the whirlpool; then came a lull, almost a hush; and then fifty strong arms, indiscriminately of town and gownsmen, were locked to keep the ground, while a storm of voices shouted for 'A ring!'

In that impromptu arena two men stood face to face, under the full glare of the gas-lamps—one was Guy Livingstone: the other a denizen of the Potteries, yclept 'Burn's Big 'un,' who had selected B—— as his training quarters, in preparation for his fight to come off in the ensuing week, with the third-best man in England, for £100 a side.

They made a magnificent contrast. Guy apparently quite composed, but the lower part of his face set stern and pitiless; an evil light in his eyes, showing how all the gladiator in his nature was roused; his left hand swaying level with his hip; all the weight of his body resting on the right foot; his lofty head thrown back haughtily; his guard low. The professional, three inches shorter than his adversary, but a rare model of brute strength; his arms and neck, where the short jersey left them exposed, clear-skinned and white as a woman's, through the perfection of his training; his hair cropped close round a low retreating forehead; his thick lips parted in a savage grin, meant to represent a smile of confidence. So they stood there—fitting champions of the races that have been antagonistic for four thousand years—Patrician and Proletarian.

Suddenly there was a commotion at one corner of the ring, and I saw a small bullet-headed man, with a voice like a fractious child, striving fanatically to force his way through. 'Don't let 'em fight!'—he screamed out—'It's robbery, I tell you. There's hundreds of pounds on him for Thursday next. I'm his trainer; and I daren't show him with a scratch on him!'

A great roar of laughter answered his entreaties, and twenty arms thrust the little man back; but his interesting charge seemed to ponder and hesitate, when a drawling, nasal voice spoke from the opposite corner—'Ah, you're right; take him away; don't show his white feather till you're druv to it.' That turned the wavering scale. The Big 'un ground his teeth with a blasphemy, and set to.

I need not go through the minutiæ of the fight: it was all one way. The professional did his best, and took his punishment like a glutton; but he could do nothing against the long reach of his adversary, who stopped and countered as coolly as if he had only the gloves on.

It was the beginning of the sixth round; our champion bore only one mark, showing where a tremendous right-hander had almost come home—a cut on his lower lip, whence the bright Norman blood was flowing freely. I will not try to describe the hideous changes that ten minutes had wrought in his opponent's countenance; but I think I was not the only spectator who felt a thrill of fear mingling with disgust, as the Big 'un made his despairing effort, and fought his way in to the terrible 'half-arm rally.' In truth, there was something unearthly and awful in the sight of the maimed and mangled Colossus; his huge breast heaving with wrath and pain; his one unblinded eye glaring unutterably; his crushed lips churning the crimson foam. It was the last rush of the Cordovan bull goaded to madness by picador and chulo: but Guy's fatal left met him, straight, unyielding as the blade of the matador; twice he reeled back well-nigh stunned; the third time he dropped his head cleverly so as to avoid the blow, and grappled. For some seconds the two were locked together, undistinguishably; then we saw Guy's right hand, never used till then, save as a guard, rise and fall twice, with a dull, smashing sound, which was bad to hear; then the huge form of the prize-fighter was whirled up unresistingly over his antagonist's hip, and fell crashing down at his feet, a heap of blind, senseless, bleeding humanity.

'Time!' You must call louder yet, before he will hear, and lance a vein in the throat before he will answer.

Then, in the old market-place of B——, there went up such a shout, as I think it has never heard since Vikings and Berserkyr caroused there after storming the town. The gownsmen, as they will do on slighter provocation, screamed themselves hoarse and voiceless with delight; and their late opponents—the honest Saxon's love of a fair fight overcoming the spirit of the partisan—echoed and prolonged the cheer.

There was no more thought of battle or broil; and there were as many navvies as University men among the enthusiasts, who bore the champion on their shoulders into 'The George.'

How we revelled on that night of victory! especially when Guy, after the necessary ablutions and change of raiment, joined us, calm and self-possessed as ever; only slightly swelled about the lower lip, and a dark red flush on his forehead. He had satisfactory accounts of his adversary;—the said amiable individual having so far recovered, under the surgeon's hands, as to swear thrice—'quite like hisself,' the messenger said—and to call for cold brandy-and-water.

Livingstone's health was proposed twice,—the first time by a fellow of King's, with a neat talent for classical allusions, who remarked that, ‘if the olive-crown of the hippodrome had fallen to the lot of Cambridge, none would deny her sister’s claim to the parsley of the Cæstus.’ The second time was very late in the evening, by McDiarmid. It must be confessed that gallant chieftain was somewhat incoherent, and amidst protestations of admiration and eternal friendship, much to our astonishment, wept profusely. Still later, he got very maudlin indeed, and was heard to murmur, looking at his scarred knuckles, that ‘he was afraid he must have hurt some one that night,’ with an accent of heartfelt sorrow and contrition which was inimitable.

We heard afterwards that the taunt which made the fight a certainty came from the commissioner of the party who stood heavily against the Big ’un, sent down to watch him in his training, and spy out the joints in his harness.

CHAPTER V.

As he rode down the sanctified bends of the Bow,
Each carline was flyting and shaking her pow;
But the young Plants of Grace they looked couthie and slee,
Saying—'Luck to thy bonnet, thou bonnie Dundee.'

In the autumn of that year my chest became so troublesome that I was obliged to try Italy. Thither I went; and, about the same time, Guy was gazetted to the —— Life Guards. The struggle between climate and constitution was protracted, and for a long time doubtful; but winters without fog, and springs without cold winds, worked wonders, and at last carried the day. In the fourth year they told me I might risk England again. Moving homeward slowly, I reached London about the beginning of December; a most unfavourable season, it is true: but I was weary of foreign wandering, and wanted to spend Christmas somewhere in the Fatherland; though where I had not yet determined.

I had heard tolerably often from Livingstone during my absence. His letters were very amusing; containing all sorts of news, and remarks on men and manners. They would have pleased me more if they had not indicated a vein of sarcasm, deepening into cynicism.

I stand very much alone in this world, and had few family visits to detain me; so on the morning after my arrival I went down to the Knightsbridge barracks, where Guy's regiment happened to be quartered.

It was a field-day—his servant said—and his master was out with his troop; but he expected him in very shortly. Captain Forrester was waiting breakfast for him upstairs.

As I entered the room, its occupant turned his head languidly on the sofa-cushion which supported it; but when he saw it was a stranger, sat up, and, on hearing my name, actually rose and came towards me.

'Livingstone will be charmed to find you here, Mr Hammond,' he said, in a voice that, though slightly affected and *traînante*, was very musical. 'I don't know if he ever mentioned Charley Forrester to you, who must do the honours of the barrack-room in his absence?'

I had heard of him very often; and, though my expectations as to his personal appearance had been raised, I own the first glance did not disappoint them. He was about three-and-twenty then, rather tall, but very slightly built; his eyes long, sleepy, of a violet-blue; features small and delicately cut, with a complexion so soft and bright, that his silky, chestnut moustache hardly saved the face from effeminacy; his hands and feet would have satisfied the Pacha of Tebelin at once as to his purity of race; indeed, though Charley was not disposed to undervalue any of his own bodily advantages, I imagine he considered his extremities as his strong point. His manner was very fascinating, and, with women, had a sort of caress in it which is hard to describe, though even with *them* he seldom excited himself much, preferring, consistently, the passive to the active part in the conversation. Indeed, his golden rule was the Arabic maxim, *Agitel il Shaitan*—Hurry is the Devil's—so, in the flirtations which were the serious business of his life, he always let his fish hook themselves, just exerting himself enough to play them afterwards.

In ten minutes we were very good friends, talking pleasantly of all sorts of things, though Forrester had resumed his recumbent posture, and I could not help fearing it was only a strong effort of politeness or sense of duty which enabled him always to answer at the right time.

Before long we heard the clatter of horses' hoofs and the rattle of steel scabbards, and I looked out at the squadrons defiling into the barrack-yard. My eye fell upon Livingstone at once; it was not difficult to distinguish him, for few, if any, among those troopers picked from the flower of all the counties north of the Humber, could compare with him for length of limb and breadth of shoulder. I felt proud of him, as the hero of my boyhood, looking at him there, on his great black charger, square and steadfast as the keep of a castle.

His servant spoke to him as he dismounted. I saw his features soften and brighten in an instant; in five seconds he was in the room, and the light was on his face still—I like to think of it—the light of a frank, cordial welcome, as he griped my hand.

He was changed, certainly, but for the better. The features, which in early youth had been too rugged and strongly marked, harmonized perfectly with the vast proportions of a frame now fully developed, though still lean in the flanks as a wolf-hound. The stern expression about his mouth was more decided and unvarying than ever—an effect which was increased by the heavy moustache that, dense as a cuirassier's of the Old Guard, fell over his lip in a black cascade. It was the face of one of those stone Crusaders who look up at us from their couches in the Round Church of the Temple.

Before our first sentences were concluded, Forrester had nerved himself to the effort of rising, and turned to go.

'You must have fifty things to say to each other,' he said. 'You'll find me in the mess-room. But, Guy, don't be long—I've no appetite myself this morning, and it will refresh me to see you eat your breakfast;' and so faded away gradually through the door.

'How do you like him?' Livingstone called out from the inner room, where he was donning the 'mufti.' 'He's not so conceited as he might be, considering how the women spoil him; and, lazy as he looks, he is a very fair officer, and goes across country like a bird. Did I ever tell you what first made him famous?'

'No; I should like to hear.'

'Well, it was at a picnic at Cliefden. Charley was hardly nineteen then, and had just joined the —th Lancers at Hounslow; he wandered away, and got lost with Kate Harcourt, a self-possessed beauty in high condition for flirting, for she had had three seasons of hard training. When they had been away from their party about two hours, she felt, or pretended to feel, the awkwardness of the situation, and asked her cavalier, in a charmingly helpless and confiding way, what they were to do? 'Well, I hardly know,' Forrester answered, languidly; 'but I don't mind proposing to you, if that will do you any good.' A fair performance for an untried colt, was it not? Miss Harcourt thought so, and said so, and Charley woke next morning with an established renown. Shall we go and find him?'

After breakfast we went with Guy to his room, to do the regulation cigar.

'I know you've made no plans, Frank,' Livingstone said, 'so I have settled everything for you already. You are coming down to Kerton with us. We have just got our long leave, and our horses went down three days ago.'

'It's very nice of him to say "our horses,"' interrupted Forrester. 'Mine consist of one young one, that has been over about eight fences in his life, and a mare, that I call the Wandering Jewess, for I don't think she will ever die, and I am sure she will never rest till she does; what with being park-hack in the summer and cover-hack in the winter, with a bye-day now and then when the country's light, she's the best instance of perpetual motion I know. Well, it's not my fault, the Chief won't let us hunt our second chargers—that's the charm of being in a crack regiment—I always have one lame at least, and no one will sell me hunters on tick.'

'Don't be so plaintive, Charley; you've nearly all mine to ride—it's a treat to them, poor things! to feel your light weight and hand, after carrying my enormous carcase. That's settled, then, Frank; you come with us?' Guy said.

'I shall be very glad. I only want a day to get my traps together.' So two days afterwards we three came down to Kerton Manor. It was not my first visit to Livingstone's home, but I have not described it before.

Fancy a very large, low house, built in two quadrangles—the offices and stables forming the smaller one furthermost from the main entrance—of the light grey stone common in Northamptonshire, darkened at the angles and buttresses into purple, and green, and bistre, by the storms of three hundred years; on the south side, smooth turf, with islands in it of bright flower-beds, sloped down to a broad, slow stream, where grave stately swans were always sailing to and fro, and moor-hens diving among the rushes; on the other sides, a park, extensive, but somewhat rough-looking, stretched away, and, all round, lines of tall avenue radiated—the bones of a dead-giant's skeleton—for Kerton once stood in the centre of a Royal Forest.

You entered into a wide low hall, the oak ceiling resting on broad square pillars of the same dark wood: all round hung countless memorials of chase and war, for the Livingstones had been hunters and soldiers beyond the memory of man.

Often, passing through of a winter's evening, I have stopped to watch the fitful effects of the great logs burning on the andirons, as their light died away, deadened among brown bear-skins and shadowy antlers, or played, redly reflected, on the mail-shirt and corselet of crusader or cavalier.

There were many portraits, too; one, the most remarkable, fronted you as you came through the great doorway, the likeness of a very handsome man in the uniform of a Light Dragoon; under this hung a cavalry sword, and a brass helmet shaded with black horsehair. The portrait and sword were those of Guy's father; the helmet belonged to the cuirassier who slew him.

It was in a skirmish with part of Kellermann's brigade, near the end of the Peninsular war; Colonel Livingstone was engaged with an adversary in his front, when a trooper, delivering point from behind, ran him through the body. He had got his death wound, and knew it; but he came of a race that ever died hard and dangerously; he only ground his teeth, and, turning short in his saddle, cut the last assailant down. Look at the helmet, with the clean even gap in it, cloven down to the cheek strap—the stout old Laird of Colonsay struck no fairer blow.

It was curious to mark how the same expression of sternness and decision about the lips and lower part of the face, which was so remarkable in their descendants, ran through the long row of ancestral portraits. You saw it—now, beneath the half-raised visor of Sir Malise, surnamed *Poing-de-fer*, who went up the breach at Ascalon, shoulder to shoulder with strong King Richard—now, yet more grimly shadowed forth, under the cowl of Prior Bernard, the ambitious ascetic, whom, they say, the great Earl of Warwick trusted as his own right hand—now, softened a little, but still distinctly visible, under the long love-locks of Prince Rupert's aide-de-camp, who died at Naseby manfully in his harness—now, contrasting strangely with the elaborately powdered peruke and delicate lace ruffles of Beau Livingstone, the gallant, with the whitest hand, the softest voice, the neatest knack at a sonnet, and the deadliest rapier, at the court of good Queen Anne. Nay, you could trace it in the features of many a fair Edith and Alice, half counteracting the magnetic attraction of their melting eyes.

On the sunny south-side, looking across the flower-garden, were Lady Catherine Livingstone's rooms, where, diligent as Matilda and her maidens, in summer by the window, in winter by the fire, the pale châtelaine sat over her embroidery. What rivers of tapestry must have flowed from under those slender white fingers during their ceaseless toil of twenty years!

The good that she did in her neighbourhood cannot be told; she was kind and hospitable, too, to her female guests, in her own haughty, undemonstrative way; nevertheless, the wives and daughters of the squirearchy regarded her with great awe and fear. Perhaps she felt this, though she could not alter it, and the sense of isolation may have deepened the shades on her sad face. She had only one thing on earth to centre her affections on, and that one she worshipped with a love stronger than her sense of duty, for, since his father died, she had never been able to check Guy in a single whim.

When he had a hunting-party in the house, she sometimes would not appear for days; but, however early he might start for the meet, I do not think he ever left his dressing-room without his mother's kiss on his cheek. She knew, as well as any one, how recklessly her son rode; nothing but his science, coolness, and great strength in the saddle, could often have saved him from some terrible accident. Many times, in the middle of the day's sport, the thought has come across me piteously, of that poor lady in her lonely rooms, trembling, and I am very sure praying, for her darling.

On the opposite side of the court were Guy's own apartments; first, what was called by courtesy his study—an armoury of guns and other weapons, a chaos *e rebus omnibus et quibusdam aliis,* for he never had the faintest conception of the beauty of order; then came the smoking-room, with its great divans and scattered card-tables; then Livingstone's bedroom and dressing-room.

Did the distance and the doors always deaden the sounds of late revels, so as not to break Lady Catherine's slumbers? I fear not.

CHAPTER VI.

> Thou art not steeped in golden languors ;
> No tranced summer calm is thine,
> Ever-varying Madeline.

It was a woodland meet, a long way off, the morning after we arrived, so we stayed at home; and, after breakfast, Guy having to give audience to keepers and other retainers, I strolled out with Forrester to smoke in the stables. I have seldom seen a lot which united so perfectly bone and blood. Livingstone gave any price for his horses; the only thing he was not particular about was their temper; more than one looked eminently unsuited to a nervous rider, and a swinging bar behind them warned the stranger against incautious approach.

After duly discussing and admiring the stud, we established ourselves on the sunniest stone bench in the garden; and I asked my companion to tell me something of what Guy had been doing during my absence.

'Well, it's rather hard to say,' answered Charley. 'He never takes the trouble to conceal anything; but then, you see, he never tells one anything, either; so it's only guess work, after all. He lives very much like other men in the Household Brigade; plays heavily, though not regularly; but he always has two *affaires de cœur*, at least, on hand at once; that's his stint.'

'So he still persecutes the weaker sex unremittingly?' I asked laughing.

'In a way peculiar to himself,' said Forrester; 'he is always strictly cautious, but decidedly sarcastic. Poor things! they are easily imposed upon; he very soon has them well in hand, and they never can get their heads up afterwards. I suppose they like it, for it seems to answer admirably. Last season he divided himself pretty equally between Constance Brandon and Flora Bellasys—quite the two best things out, though as opposite to each other in every way as the poles. To do Miss Brandon justice, I don't think she knew much of the other flirtation; she always went away early, and he used to take up her rival for the rest of the evening.'

'But the said rival—how did she like the divided homage?'

'Not at all at first; at least, she used to look revolvers at Guy from time to time—(ah, you should see the Bellasys' eyes when they begin to lighten)—but he always brought her back to the lure, and at last she seemed to take it quite as a matter of course; keeping all her after-supper waltzes for him religiously, though half the men in town were trying to cut in. I can't make out how he does it. Do you think his size and sinews can have anything to do with it?' He said this gravely and reflectively.

'Not unlikely,' I replied; 'the *fortiter in re* goes a long way with women apparently, even where there is not a tongue like his to back it. Don't you remember Juvenal's strong-minded heroine, who left husband and home to follow the scarred, maimed gladiator? I doubt if the Mirmillo was a pleasant or intellectual companion. Now, I want you to tell me something about Guy's cousin and her father; they are coming to-day, I hear, and I have never met them.'

'Mr Raymond is very like most calm, comfortable old men with a life interest in £2000 a year,' Charley said; 'rather more cold and impassible than the generality, perhaps. He *must* be clever, for he plays whist better than any one I know; but not brilliant, certainly. His daughter is'—the colour deepened on his cheek perceptibly—'very charming, most people think; but I hate describing people. I always caricature the likeness. You'll form your own judgment at dinner. Shall we go in? We shoot an outlying cover after luncheon, and the blackthorns involve gaiters.'

We had very fair sport, and were returning across the park, picking up a stray rabbit every now and then in the tufts of long grass and patches of brake. One had just started before Forrester, and he was in the act of pulling the trigger, when Livingstone said suddenly—

'There's my uncle's carriage coming down the north avenue.'

It was an easy shot in the open, but Charley missed it clean.

'What eyes you have, Guy!' he said, pettishly; 'but I wish you wouldn't speak to a man on his shot.'

Guy's great Lancaster rang out with the roar of a small field-piece, and the rabbit was rolling over, riddled through the head, before he answered—

'Yes, my eyes *are* good, and I see a good many things, but I *don't* see why you should have muffed that shot, particularly as my intelligence was meant for the world in general, and it was not such an astounding remark after all.'

Charley did not seem ready with a reply, so he retained his look of injured innocence, and walked on, sucking silently at his cigar. The Raymonds reached the house before us; but not being in a presentable state, I did not see them before dinner.

Forrester was right; there was nothing startling about Mr Raymond. He had one of those thin highbred looking faces that one always fancies would have suited admirably the powder and ruffles of the last century. It expressed little, except perfect repose; and when he spoke, which was but seldom, no additional light came into his hard blue eyes. His daughter was his absolute contrast—a lovely delicate little creature, with silky dark-brown hair, and eyes *en suite,* and colour that deepened and faded twenty times in an hour, without ever losing the softness of its tints. She had the ways of a child petted all its life through, that a harsh word would frighten to annihilation. She seemed very fond of Guy, though evidently rather afraid of him at times.

Nothing passed at dinner worth mentioning; but soon after the ladies left us, Mr Raymond turned lazily to his nephew to inquire—

'If he would mind asking Bruce to come and stay at Kerton, as he was to be in the neighbourhood soon after Christmas.'

He did not seem to feel the faintest interest in the reply.

'I shall be too glad, Uncle Henry,' answered Guy (he did not look particularly charmed though), 'if it will give you or Bella any pleasure. Need he be written to immediately?'

'Thank you very much,' said Raymond, languidly. 'I know he bores you, and I am sure I don't wonder at it; but one must be civil to one's son-in-law that is to be. No, you need not trouble yourself to invite him yet. Bella can do it when she writes. I suppose she *does* write to him sometimes.'

I looked across the table at Forrester. This was the first time I had heard of Miss Raymond's engagement. He met my eye quite unconcernedly, pursuing with great interest his occupation of peeling walnuts, and dropping them into sherry. It did not often happen to him to blush *twice* in the twenty-four hours. Directly afterwards we began to talk about pheasants and other things.

After coffee in the drawing-room, Guy sat down to piquet with his uncle. Raymond liked to utilize his evenings, and never played for nominal stakes. He was the *beau idéal* of a card-player certainly; no revolution or persistence of luck could ruffle the dead calm of his courteous face. He would win the money of his nearest and dearest friend, or lose his own to an utter stranger, with the same placidity. To be sure, to a certain extent, he had enslaved Fortune: though he always played most loyally, and sometimes would forego an advantage he might fairly have claimed, his rare science made ultimate success scarcely doubtful. He never touched a game of mere chance.

I heard a good story of him in Paris. They were playing a game like brag; the principle being that the players increase the stakes without seeing each other's cards, till one refuses to go on, and throws up, or shows his point. Raymond was left in at last with one adversary; the stakes had mounted up to a sum that was fearful, and it was his choice to double or *abattre.* Of course, it was of the last importance to discover whether the antagonist was strong or not; but the Frenchman's face gave not the slightest sign. He was *beau joueur s'il en fût,* and had lost two fair fortunes at play. Raymond hesitated, looking steadily into his opponent's eyes. All at once he smiled and doubled instantly. The other dared not go on; he showed his point, and lost. They asked Raymond afterwards how he could have detected any want of confidence to guide him in a face that looked like marble?

'I saw three drops of perspiration on his forehead,' he said; 'and I knew my own hand was strong.'

Lady Catherine was resting on a sofa; she looked tired and paler than usual, not in the least available for conversation. Miss Raymond had nestled herself into the recesses of a huge arm-chair close to the fire—she was as fond of warmth, when she could not get sunshine, as a tropical bird—and Forrester was lounging on an ottoman behind her, so that his head almost touched her elbow. When I caught scraps of their conversation, it seemed to be turning on the most ordinary subjects; but even in these I should have felt lost—I had been so long away from England—so I contented myself with watching them, and wondering why discussions as to the merits of operas and inquiries after mutual acquaintances should make the fair cheeks hang out signals of distress so often as they did that evening.

I lingered in the smoking-room about midnight for a moment after Forrester left us.

'So your cousin is really engaged?' I asked Guy.

'*Tout ce qu'il y a de plus fiancé,*' was the answer. 'It was one of the last affairs of state that my poor aunt concluded before she died. Bruce is a very good match: I don't think Bella worships him, though I have scarcely ever seen them together, and I am sure he is not a favourite with Uncle Henry; but nothing on earth would make him break it off; indeed, I know no one who would propose such a thing to him—not his daughter, certainly. There's no such hopeless obstacle as the passive resistance of a thoroughly lazy man. Good night, Frank. I've sent the Baron on for you to-morrow. We must start about nine, mind, for we've fifteen miles to go to cover.'

I went to bed, and dreamt that Raymond was playing *écarté* with Forrester for his daughter, who stood by blushing beautifully—and never held a trump!

CHAPTER VII.

She has two eyes so soft and brown;
Take care!
She gives a side glance, and looks down;
Beware! beware!
Trust her not; she is fooling thee.

So the days went on. The stream of visitors usual in a country house during the hunting season, flowed in and out of Kerton Manor without any remarkable specimen showing itself above the surface. One individual, perhaps, I ought to except, the curate of the parish, who was a very constant visitor.

His appearance was not fascinating; he had a long narrow head, thatched with straight scanty hair, little protruding eyes, and a complexion of a bright unvarying red; in fact he was very like a prawn.

It was soon evident that the Rev. Samuel Foster was helplessly smitten by Miss Raymond, or, as Forrester elegantly expressed it, 'hard hit in the wings, and crippled for flying!' Helplessly, I say, but not hopelessly; for that wicked little creature, acting perhaps under private orders, gave him all sorts of treacherous encouragement. I never saw any human being evolve so much caloric under excitement as he did, except one young woman whom I met ages ago —(a most estimable person ; her Sunday-school was a model)—whose only way of evincing any emotion either of anger, fear, pain, or pleasure was—a profuse perspiration. Mr Foster not only got awfully hot, but electrical into the bargain. His thin hairs used to stand out distinctly and in relief from his head and face, just like a person on the glass tripod. Charley suggested insulating him unawares, and getting a flash out of his knuckles, if not out of his brain. In truth, it was piteous to see the struggle between passion and nervousness that raged perpetually within him. He would stand for some time casting *lamb's*-eyes at the object of his affections—to the amorous audacity of the full-grown sheep he never soared—then suddenly, without the slightest provocation, he would discharge at her a compliment, elaborate, long-winded, Grandisonian, as a raw recruit fires his musket, shutting his eyes, and incontinently take to flight, without waiting to see the effect of his shot. If he had spent half the time and pains on his sermons that he did on his small-talk (I believe he used to write out three or four foul copies of each sentence previously, at home) what a boon it would have been to his unlucky audience on Sundays !

Why is it that the great proportion of our pastors seem to conspire together with one consent to make the periodical duty of listening to them as hard as possible? Can they imagine there is profit or pleasure in a discourse wandering wearily round in a circle, or dragging a slow length along of truisms and trivialities? In the best of congregations there can be but few alchemists; and, without that science, who is to extract the essence of Truth from the *moles incongesta* of crass moralities?

To persuade or dissuade you must interest the head or the heart. I admire those who can do either successfully, but I do protest against those clerical tyrants who shelter themselves behind their licence, to fire at us their ruthless platitudes. If such could only struggle against that strong temptation of our fallen nature—the delight of hearing one's own sweet voice—so as to concentrate now and then! The best orators, spiritual and mundane, have been brief sometimes.

I am no theologian; but I take leave to doubt if, in the elaborate divinity of fourteen epistles, the apostle of the Gentiles ever went so straight to his hearer's heart as in that farewell charge, when the elders of Ephesus gathered round him on the sea sand, 'Sorrowing most of all for the words that he spake, that they should see his face no more.'

Do you remember Canning and the clergyman? When the latter asked him, 'How did you like my sermon? I endeavoured not to be tedious?' I always fancy the statesman's weary wistful look, which would have been compassionate but for a sense of personal injury, as he answered, in his mild voice, 'And yet—*you were.*'

Well, the flirtation went on its way rejoicing, to the intense amusement of all of us, especially of Forrester; till one day his cousin came into Guy's study, who had just returned from hunting, looking rather frightened, like a child who has let fall a valuable piece of china:—it was only an honest man's heart that she had broken. Slowly the truth came out, Mr Foster had proposed to her that afternoon in the park.

We, far off in the drawing-room, heard the shrill whistle with which Livingstone greeted the intelligence.

'You accepted him of course?' he said.

'O Guy!' Miss Raymond answered, blushing more than ever. (I'll back a woman against the world for expressing half a chapter by a simple interjection; Lord Burleigh's nod is nothing to it.) 'But, indeed,' she went on, 'I'm very sorry about it; I never saw any one look so unhappy before. Do you know I think I saw the tears standing in his eyes; and I only guessed at the words, when he said, "God bless you!"'

'Ah, bah!' replied Guy, with his most cynical smile on his lip; 'he'll recover. Who breaks his heart in these days, especially for such little dots of things as you? But, Bella mia, how do you think Mr Bruce would approve of all these innocent amusements?'

It was no blush now, but a dead waxen whiteness, that came over the beautiful face, even down to the chin. The soft brown eyes grew fixed and wild with an imploring terror. 'You won't tell him?' she gasped out; and then stood quivering and shuddering. Guy was very much surprised: he had never believed greatly in his cousin's affection for her betrothed; but here there were signs, not only of the absence of love, but of the presence of physical fear.

'My dear child,' he said very kindly, 'don't alarm yourself so absurdly. I have not the honour of Mr Bruce's confidence; and if I had, how could I tell him of an affair where *I* have been most to blame? I'll speak to Foster: he must not show his disappointment even before Uncle Henry. You will be quite safe, you see. But, mind, I won't allow *any one* to frighten or vex my pet cousin.' His countenance lowered as he spoke, and there was a threat in his eyes.

As the cloud darkened on his face, the light came back on Isabel Raymond's. She took his hand—all fibre and sinew, like an oak-bough—into her slender fingers, and pressed it hard. In good truth, a woman at her need could ask no better defender than he who stood by her side then, tall, strong, black-browed, and terrible, as Saul. 'Thank you so much, dear Guy,' she whispered. 'If you speak to Mr Foster, you will tell him how *very* sorry I am!' and then she left him.

Guy did speak to the curate: I hope gently. At all events we never laughed at him again. How could we, when we saw him going about his daily duties, honestly and bravely, and always, when in presence, struggling with his great sorrow, so as not by word or look to compromise the thoughtless child, who had won his heart for her amusement, and thrown it away for her convenience?

I have been disciplined since by what I have felt and seen, and I see, now, how ungenerous we had been.

What right had we to make of that man a puppet for our amusement, because he was shy, and stupid, and slow? He was as true in his devotion, as honourable in all his wishes, as confident in his hopes till they were blasted, as any one that has gone a-wooing since the first whisper of love was heard in Eden. If his despair was less crushing than that of other men, it was because his principles were stronger to endure, and perhaps because his temperament was more tranquil and cold. As I have said, he did his day's work thoroughly, and that helped him through a good deal. But to the utmost of his nature, I believe he did suffer. And could the long train of those whom disappointment has made maniacs or suicides do more?

Let us not trust too much in the absence of feeling in these seemingly impassive organizations.

I wonder how often the executors of old College Fellows, or of hard-faced bankers and bureaucrats, have been aggravated by finding in that most secret drawer, which ought to have held a codicil or a jewel, a tress, a glove, or a flower? The searcher looks at the object for a moment, and then throws it into the rubbish-basket, with a laugh if he is good-natured, with a curse if he is vicious and disappointed. Let it lie there—though the dead miser valued it above all his bank-stock, and kissed it oftener than he did his living and lawful wife and children—what is it worth now? Say, as the grim Dean of St Patrick wrote on *his* love-token—'Only a woman's hair.'

Now these men, unknown to their best friend perhaps, had gone through the affliction which is so common, that it is hard to speak of it without launching into truisms. This sorrow has made some men famous, by forcing them out into the world and shutting the door behind them. It has made the fortunes of some poets, who choose the world for their confidant, setting their bereavement to music, and bewailing Eurydice in charming volumes, that are cheap at '3*s.* 6*d.* in cloth, lettered.' It has made some—I think the best and bravest—somewhat silent for the rest of their lives. I read some lines, the other day, wise enough to have sprung from an older brain than Owen Meredith's.

> They were pedants who could speak—
> Grander souls have passed unheard;
> Such as felt all language weak;
> Choosing rather to record
> Secrets before Heaven, than break
> Faith with angels, by a word——.

Yes! many men have their Rachel; but—there being a prejudice against bigamy—few have even the Patriarch's luck, to marry her at last. For the wife *de convenance* generally outlives her younger sister; and so, one afternoon, we turn again from a grave in Ephrata-Green Cemetery, somewhat drearily, into our tent pitched in the plains of Belgravia, where Leah—(there was ever jealousy between those two)—meets us with a sharp glance of triumph in her 'tender eyes.'

We have known pleasanter *tête-à-têtes*—have we not?—than that which we undergo that evening at dinner; though our companion seems disposed to be especially lively. We have not much appetite; but our *carissima sposa* tells us, 'not to drink any more claret, or we shall never be fit to take her to Lady Shechem's *conversazione.*' Of all nights in the year would she let us off duty on this one? 'There are to be some very pleasant people there,' she says, 'though none, perhaps, that *you particularly care about.*' (Thank you, my love; I understand that good-natured allusion perfectly, and am proportionately grateful.) Her voice sounds shriller than usual, as she says this, and leaves us to put some last touches to her toilette. So we order a fresh bottle, notwithstanding the warning, and fall to thinking. How low and soft *that other* voice was, and, even when a little reproachful, how rarely sweet! *She* would scarcely have invented that last taunt, if matters had turned out differently. Then we think of our respected father-in-law, Sir Joseph Leyburn, of Harran Park—a mighty county magistrate and cattle-breeder. He got Ishmael Deadeye, the poacher, transported last year, and took the prize for Devons at the Great Mesopotamian Agricultural, with a brindled bull. We remember his weeping at the wedding-breakfast over the loss of his eldest treasure ; and wonder if he was an arrant humbug, or only a foolish fond old man, inclining morosely towards the former opinion. We don't seem to care much about Sir Roland de Vaux, the celebrated geologist, whom we shall have the privilege of meeting this evening. What are strata to us, when our thoughts will not go lower than about *eight feet* underground ? We shall be rather bored than otherwise by Dr Sternhold, that eminent Christian divine, who passes his leisure hours in proving St Paul to have been an unsound theologian and a weak dialectician. Why should Mr Planet, the intrepid traveller, be always inflicting Jerusalem upon us, as if no one had ever visited the Holy Land before him ? Our ancestors did so five hundred years ago, and did not make half the fuss about it ; and *they* had a skirmish or two there worth speaking of, while we don't believe a word of Planet's encounter with those three Arabs on the Hebron road. Pooh ! there's no more peril in traversing the Wilderness of Cades, than in going up to the Grands Mulets. We are not worthy of those distinguished men, and would prefer the society of hard-riding Dick Foley of the Blues. He had a few feelings in common with us once on a certain point (how we hated him then!), and he won't wonder if we are duller than usual this evening. Perhaps his own nerve will scarcely be as iron as usual in the Grand Military, to come off in the course of the week.

'Well, the bottle is out, and Mademoiselle Zelpa comes to say that 'Madame is ze raidèe.' So one glass of cognac neat, as a *chasse* (to more things than good claret), and then—let us put on our whitest tie, and our most attractive smile, and 'go forth, for she is gone.'

CHAPTER VIII.

A man had given all other bliss,
And all his worldly worth for this,
To waste his whole heart in one kiss
Upon her perfect lips.

We were asked to dine and sleep at Brainswick, where the hounds met on the following morning. Mr Raymond could not make up his mind to the exertion, so Forrester and I accompanied Guy alone.

'By-the-by,' the latter observed, as we were driving over in his mail-phaeton, 'I wonder if we shall see the Bellasys to-night? I know they were to come down about this time. Steady, old wench! Where are you off to?' (This was to the near wheeler, who was breaking her trot.) 'I think you'll admire her, Frank; but, *gare à vous*, she's dangerous. Eh, Charley?'

'Well, you ought to know,' answered Forrester; 'I never tried her much myself. She's two or three stone over my weight. I wonder what she has been doing lately? They sent her down to rusticate somewhere at the end of the season. She ought to be in great condition now, with a summer's run.

Livingstone smiled, complacently I thought, as if some one had praised one of his favourite hunters, but did not pursue the subject.

When I came down before dinner he was talking to a lady in dark-blue silk with black lace over it, a wreath curiously plaited of natural ivy in her hair. I guessed her at once to be Flora Bellasys.

Let me try to paint—though abler artists have failed—the handsomest brunette I have ever seen.

She was very tall; her figure magnificently developed, though slender-waisted and lithe as a serpent: she walked as if she had been bred in a *basquina,* and her foot and ankle were hardly to be matched on this side of the Pyrenees: the nose slightly aquiline, with thin transparent nostrils; and the forehead rather low,—it looked more so, perhaps, from the thick masses of dark hair which framed and shaded her face. Under the clear pale olive of the cheeks the rich blood mantled now and then like wine in a Venice glass; and her lips—the outline of the upper one just defined by a pencilling of down, the lower one full and pouting—glistened with the brilliant smoothness of a pomegranate flower where the dew is clinging. Her eyes—the opium-eaters of Stamboul never dreamt of their peers among the bevies of hachis-houris. They were of the very darkest hazel: one moment sleeping lazily under their long lashes, like a river under leaves of water-lilies; the next, sparkling like the same stream when the sunlight is splintered on its ripples into carcanets of diamonds. When they chose to speak, not all the orators that have rounded periods since Isocrates could match their eloquence; when it was their will to guard a secret, they met you with the cold, impenetrable gaze that we might attribute to the Mighty Mother, Cybèle. Even a philosopher might have been interested—on purely psychological grounds of course—in watching the thoughts as they rose one by one to the surface of those deep, clear wells (was truth at the bottom of them?—I doubt), like the strange shapes of beauty that reveal themselves to seamen, coyly and slowly through the purple calm of the Indian Sea.

Twice I have chosen a watery simile; but I know no other element combining, as her glances did, liquid softness with lustre.

When near her, you were sensible of a strange, subtle, intoxicating perfume, very fragrant, perfectly indefinable, which clung, not only to her dress, but to everything belonging to her. From what flowers it was distilled no artist in essences alive could have told. I incline to think that, like the 'birk' in the ghost's garland,

> They were not grown on earthly bank,
> Nor yet on earthly sheugh.

Guy took Miss Bellasys in to dinner, and I found myself placed on her other side. I had been introduced to her ten minutes before, but had little opportunity for 'improving the occasion,' as the Nonconformists have it, for she never once deigned a look in my direction.

My right-hand neighbour was an elderly man of a full habit, whom it would have been cruel to disturb till the rage of hunger was appeased: so I was fain to seek amusement in the conversation going on on my left. There was no indiscretion in this, for I knew Guy would never touch secrets of state in mixed company.

For some time they talked nothing but commonplaces, evidently feeling each other's foils. The real fencing began with a question from Flora—if he was not surprised at seeing her there that evening.

'Not at all,' was the reply; 'I knew we must meet before long. It is only parallels that don't; and there is very little of the right-line about either you or me.'

'Speak for yourself,' Miss Bellasys said; 'I consider that a very rude observation.'

'Pardon me,' retorted Guy; 'I seldom say rude things—never intentionally. I don't know which is in worst taste, that, or paying point-blank compliments. Without being mathematical, you may have heard that the line of beauty is a curve.'

Flora laughed.

'It is difficult to catch you. What have you been doing since we parted?'

'That is just the question that was on my lips, so nearly uttered that I consider I spoke first. Now, will you confess, or must I cross-question some one else? I *will* know. It is easy to follow you, like an invading army, by the trail of devastation.'

'So you do care to know?' the soft voice said, that could make the nerves of even an indifferent hearer thrill and quiver strangely.

After once listening to it, it was very easy to believe the weird stories of Norse sorceresses, and German wood-spirits and nixies, luring men to death with their fatally musical tones.

'Simple curiosity,' Guy replied, coolly, 'and a little compassion for your victims. They might be friends of mine, you know.'

Miss Bellasys bit her lip, half provoked, half amused, apparently, as she answered, 'The dead tell no tales.'

'No, but the wounded do; and they cry ou pretty loudly sometimes. I suppose all the cases did not terminate fatally. Will you confess?'

'I have nothing to tell you,' Flora said, very demurely and meekly—only, for once her eyes betrayed her. 'Mamma took me down into Devonshire, where we have an aunt or two, for sea breezes and seclusion. I rather liked at first having nothing on earth to do, and nothing—yes, I understand—really nothing, to think about. I used to sleep a great deal, and then drive a little obstinate pony, to see views. But I don't care much about views—do you? Then mamma was always wanting me to help her look for shells and wild flowers; and the rocks hurt my feet, and the bushes never would leave me alone in the woods.' She shuddered slightly here.

'The Bushes! a Devonshire family of that name, I presume?' Guy interrupted, with intense gravity. 'How wrong of them! They are very ill-regulated young men down in those parts, I believe?'

'Don't be absurd; I never saw a creature for months between fifteen and fifty. Are not those ages safe?' (A shake of the head from Livingstone.) 'I began to be very unhappy; I had no one to tease; my aunts are too good-natured, and mamma is used to it. At last I had the greatest mind to do something desperate—to write to you for instance—merely to see the household's horror when your answer came. You would have answered, would you not? I should not have opened it, you know, but given it to mamma, like a good child.'

'Of course; I know you show all your letters to your mother. But that ruralizing must have been fearful for you, *poverina!* People were talking a good deal of agricultural distress; but this is the most piteous case I've heard of. So there were really no men to govern in that wood?'

"Not even a little boy,' said Flora, decisively.

'There were two or three from Oxford in the neighbourhood; I used to see them sitting outside their lodgings in the sun, like rabbits, but they always ran in before—'

'Before you could get a shot at them, you mean?' broke in Guy; 'you ought to have crept up, and stalked them cleverly.'

Flora threw back her handsome head—'I don't war with children. It went on just as I tell you, till we left for our round of winter visits, which have been very stupid and correct, till now.'

I hardly caught the last two words, she spoke them so low. There was silence for several minutes, and then Guy leant back to address me.

'Do you remember Arthur Darrell of Christchurch, Frank, the man that used to speak at the Union, and was always raving about ebon locks and dark eyes?'

'I remember him well. I have not seen him for years; but I heard he was getting on well in the law.'

'He'll have time to get tired of brunettes—if any one ever *does* get tired of them—before he comes back,' said Guy. 'He's just gone out to try the Indian bar.'

'What could have put such an idea into his head?' I asked, very innocently

'I can't say,' was the reply; 'men do take such curious fancies. It was a sudden determination, I believe. The beauties of the Eastern hemisphere began to develop themselves to his weak mind last summer while he was down with his people in—Devonshire.'

Involuntarily I looked at Miss Bellasys. She saw she was detected; but, instead of betraying any embarrassment, she turned upon Guy a queer little imploring look, not indicative in the least of shame or repentance, but such as might be put on by one of those truly excellent people who do good by stealth and blush to find it known, when some of their benevolent acts have come to light, and they wish to deprecate praise.

Livingstone gazed piercingly at her for several instants without moving a muscle of his face; suddenly its fixed and stern expression—you could not say softened, but—broke up all at once like a sheet of ice shivering.

'Let there be peace,' he said, sententiously. 'We forgive all the errors of your long vacation, in consideration of the good it has evidently done you. You are looking brilliantly!'

There was an unusual softness, almost a tremor, in his deep voice, as he spoke the last words; and a look in his bold eyes that many trained coquettes would have shrunk from—a look that I should be sorry and angry to see turned on any woman in whom I felt an interest. A look such as Selim Pasha might wear as the Arnauts defile into his harem-court, bringing the fair Georgians home.

Flora Bellasys only smiled in saucy triumph.

'You say you never pay compliments,' she answered; 'and I always *try* to believe you. We will suppose this one is only the truth extorted. My glove —thank you.' The same smile was on her lip as she turned her head once in her haughty progress to the door.

As Guy sat down again, and filled a huge glass with claret, I heard him mutter between his teeth— "*Royale, quand même!*'

'Close up, gentlemen, close up!' broke in the cheery voice of our rare old host. 'Livingstone, if you begin back-handing already, you'll never be able to hold that great raking chestnut I saw your groom leading this evening. The man looked as if he thought he would be eaten before he got in.'

'Whatever you do, drink fair,' Guy answered, laughing; 'so saith the immortal Gamp. The Squire's beginning to tremble for his '22 wine.'

'I don't wonder,' said Godfrey Parndon, the M.F.H. 'I've always observed that, after flirting disgracefully at dinner, you drink harder afterwards. It's to drown remorse, I suppose. So you ride that new horse of yours to-morrow? My poor hounds!'

'Don't be alarmed,' replied Guy, 'he never kicks hounds, and I won't let him go over them; it's only human strangers the amiable animal can't endure:

that's why I call him the Axeine. He is worth more than the £300 I gave for him.'

'Well! he nearly spoilt two grooms for Hounscott,' Parndon said. 'The stablemen at Revesby had a great beer the day they got rid of him.'

'He wouldn't suit every one,' remarked Livingstone. 'Not you, for instance, Godfrey, who always ride with a loose rein. I was obliged to give him his gallops myself, at first; he's a devil to pull, and if he once gets away with you you may "write to your friends." But I've nothing like him in my stable.'

Then the conversation became general, revolving in a circle of hound-and-horse talk, as it will do now and then in the shires.

'Guy,' whispered Forrester, as we went up-stairs, 'there's a little woman here who says she used to know you very well: won't you go and talk to her?'

'Many little women say that,' answered Guy; 'it's a way they have. Which is it now?'

Charley pointed out a small, plump, rather pretty blonde, with long ringlets, and light, laughing blue eyes. It seemed the lady's reminiscences were well founded, for in five minutes Livingstone and she were talking like old friends.

In the course of the evening I found myself near Miss Bellasys. This time she did me the honour to address me, and soon began asking me more questions than I could answer, even had she waited a reply.—Did I like Kerton Manor? Had there been many agreeable people there yet?—Not any remarkably so!—She was surprised at that. Miss Raymond was there *en permanence* of course? She was such a favourite with her (Flora), and with her cousin too, she thought. Was Mr Livingstone always playing with his uncle, and always losing? She supposed he liked losing—at play. Did I know the lady in pink, with twenty-five flowers in her hair? She had counted them. Yes! that was her husband; the stout man looking uncomfortable in the corner. An old friend of Mr Livingstone's? He had so many old friends; but he did not always talk to them for a whole evening without intermission. Ah! she was going to sing; that is, if Mr Livingstone had quite finished with her, and would let her go. Little women with pink cheeks and dresses always *did* sing, and never had any voice.

I don't know how many more questions she put to me in the same quiet, clear tones; but just then I happened to look down on the handkerchief she held in her hand, and I saw a long rent in its broad Valenciennes border that I am very sure was not there an hour ago; for Flora's toilette, morning and evening, was faultless to a degree.

I had hardly time to remark this, when Guy lounged up to us. My companion's dark eyes were more eloquent than her lips, which quivered slightly, as she said—

'I wonder you have not more consideration. A new arrival in the country, and compromised irretrievably! Look at Mr Strafford now.'

'The husband?' Guy said, with intense disdain; 'the husband's helpless. He may sharpen his—tusks, but he'll never come to battle. How good and great you are! It is quite refreshing to hear your strictures on innocent amusements. But I beg you will speak of that lady with due respect; she is the first—yes, positively the first—woman I ever loved!'

'*Monseigneur, que d'honneur!*' Flora said, curling her haughty lip.

'It is true,' Guy went on. 'At a children's ball, about fifteen years ago, I met my fate; she was in white muslin, with a velvet boddice' (Flora shuddered visibly); 'for a year after I pictured to myself the angels in no other attire, and now—years vitiate one's fancies so—I can fancy nothing but a jockey, in "black body and white sleeves." I suppose she was very pretty; let us hope so! it is my only excuse for being enchanted ten minutes, and stupidly enslaved in half an hour. The thing would not have been complete without a rival; he came—a plump, circular-faced boy, with severely flaxen hair. No, you need not look across the room—not the least like what she is now! Great jealousy may make me unjust, but I don't think he had any advantage over me, save one, and he used that mercilessly. He wore collars standing boldly erect under his fat cheeks, while those of the rest of us lay prostrate, after the simple fashion of my childhood. The *prestige* was too much for Ellen's weak mind (did I tell you her name was Ellen ?)—Bottom monopolized Titania for the rest of the evening. I could have beaten him with ease and satisfaction to myself, but I refrained; and, rushing into the supper-room, drained three glasses of weak negus with the energy of despair.

'I have never suffered anything since like the torment of the next two hours. I saw her several times afterwards, and might have made play, perhaps; but the phantom of a round red face, with collars starched *à l'outrance*, always came between us. It was only a slight satisfaction to hear that she has utterly lost sight of my rival, and promises to cut him dead the first time they meet. There's the history of a young heart blighted—of a crushed affection! I am not aware that there is any moral in it; if there is, you are welcome to it, I am sure. You might look a little more sympathizing, though, even if I *have* bored you.'

Flora tried to look grave, but the dancing light in her rebellious eyes betrayed her, even before her merry musical laugh broke in.

'It is far the most touching thing I ever heard.

Poor child! how you must have suffered! I wonder you ever smiled again. How well she sings, does she not?—when she does not try to go too high.'

'Don't be severe,' Guy retorted; 'you may have to sing yourself some day. You prefer talking, though? Well, with a well-managed *contralto*, it comes nearly to the same thing; and I suppose you consider the world in general is not worthy of it?'

Almost imperceptibly, but very meaningly, her glance turned to where I sat close behind her.

'How absurd! you know why I don't sing often. To-night it would be—too cruel.' (Flora's idea of modest merit was peculiar.) 'Now, tell me, what are you going to ride to-morrow? We shall all go and see them throw off.'

Without answering her question he leant over her, and said something too low for me to hear, which made her colour brighten.

From a distant corner two ancient virgins, long past 'mark of mouth,' surveyed the procedings with faces like moulds of lemon-ice. Flora glanced towards them this time, and said demurely, making a gesture of crossing her arms *à la Napoléon I.*—'Take care; from the summit of yonder sofa forty ages behold you.'

The caution was a challenge; and so her hearer interpreted it, as he sank down beside her.

I seemed to be lapsing rapidly into the terrible *third* that spoils sport, so I left them ; but not all the adjurations of Godfrey Parndon invoking his favourite antagonist to the whist-table could draw Guy from his post again that evening.

I know men who would have given five years of life for the whisper that glided into his ear as he gave Miss Bellasys her candle on retiring, ten for the Parthian glance that shot its arrow home.

CHAPTER IX.

I know the purple vestment;
  I know the crest of flame;
So ever *rides* Mamilius,
  Prince of the Latian name.

The next was a perfect hunting morning: a light breeze, steady from the south-west, and not too much sun; the very day when a scent, in and out of cover, would be a certainty, if there were any calculating on this contingency. Let us do our sisters justice—there is *one* thing in nature more uncertain and capricious than the whims of womankind.

The hounds had come up with their usual train of officials, and of those steady-going sportsmen who love the pack better than their own children, and can call each individual in it by his name. Godfrey Parndon was doing the civil to the 'great men in Israel,' his heaviest subscribers; pinks were gleaming in every direction through the clumps and belts of plantation, as the men came up at a hard gallop on their cover-hacks, or opened the pipes of their hunters by a stretch over the turf of the park.

On the hall-steps stood Flora Bellasys—Penthesilea in a wide-awake and plume ; a dozen men were round her, striving emulously for a word or a smile, and she held her own gallantly with them all ; she was waiting patiently till Guy had lighted an obstinate cigar, and was ready to mount her. He understood putting her up better than any one else, she said. Perhaps he did ; but, though he swung her into the saddle with one wave of his mighty arm as lightly as Lochinvar could have done, the arrangement of the skirt and stirrup seemed a problem hardly to be solved.

If there was any truth in the old Courland superstition, that the display of a lady's ankle to the hunters before they started brought them luck, we ought to have had the run of the season that day.

He rode by her side, too, as near as the plunges of the chestnut would allow, till we reached the gorse that we were to draw ; once there the stronger passion prevailed. Aphroditè hid her face, and the great goddess Artemis claimed her own. As the first hound whimpered, he drew off towards a corner, where a big fence would give him a chance of shaking off the crowd, and I do not think he turned his head till the fox went away.

The last thing I remember there was the anxious look in two beautiful hazel eyes as they gazed after the Axeine, charging his second fence with the rush of an express train.

The *fétiche* did not fail us; we had a wonderful run, of which only five men saw the end. I confess the second brook stopped me and many others. Forrester got over with a fall; but they were preparing to break up the fox, when he came up first of the second flight.

Guy came home in great spirits; he had been admirably carried. He and the first whip, a ten-stone man, were head and head at the last fence, while the hounds were rolling over their fox, a hundred yards farther, in the open.

After dinner he amused himself by teasing his cousin. At last he asked her if she would lend him Bella Donna to hack to cover, as his own favourite was rather lame.

Miss Raymond's indignation was superb; for, be it known, she was prouder of the said animal than of anything else in the world.

She (the mare, not the lady) was a bright bay, with black points, quite thorough-bred, and as handsome as a picture. Livingstone had bought her out of a training-stable, and had given her to his cousin, after having her broken into a perfect light-weight hunter.

One of the few extravagances in which Mr Raymond indulged his daughter was, allowing her to take Bella Donna wherever she went.

'Don't excite yourself, you small Amazon!' replied Guy to her indignant refusal. 'How you do believe in that mare! I wonder you don't put her into some of the great Spring Handicaps! You would get her in light, and might win enough to keep you in gloves for half a century.'

'Well, I don't know,' Forrester's slow, languid voice suggested; 'I think she's faster, for three miles, than anything in your stable. I should like to run the best you have for £50, weight for inches.'

'I am not surprised at your supporting Bella's opinion,' said Guy, with a shade of sarcasm in his voice; 'but I did not expect that you would back it. Come, I'll make this match, if you like: you shall ride catch-weight, which will be about 11st. 7lb.; and I'll ride the Axeine at 14st. 7lb.: I must take a 7lb. saddle to do that. They are both in hard condition, so it can come off in ten days; and I'll give the farmers a cup to run for at the same time. Is it a match?'

'Certainly, if Miss Raymond will trust me with Bella Donna.'

Isabel's eyes sparkled—so brilliantly! as she answered, 'I should like it, of all things.'

'Now, Puss,' Guy went on, 'you ought to have something on it. There is a certain set of turquoises and pearls that I meant to give you whenever you had been good for three weeks consecutively; it is no use waiting for such a miracle, so I'll bet you these against that sapphire and diamond ring you have taken to wearing lately.'

His cousin looked distressed and confused. 'Anything else, Guy?' she said. 'I cannot risk that; it was a present from—Mrs Molyneux.'

'I don't think,' Charley suggested very quietly, 'Mrs—Molyneux, was it not?—could object to your investing her present on such a certainty. I really believe we shall bring it off; and, if not—' He checked himself with a smile.

'Oh, if you think so,' answered Isabel, blushing more than ever, 'I will venture my ring. But you *must* win; I don't know what I should do if I lost it.' So it was settled.

'You seem confident,' I remarked to Livingstone, later in the evening. I remember the peculiar expression of his face, though I did not then understand it, as he answered gravely—

'Bella ought to be; for—she has laid long odds.'

There was great excitement in the neighbourhood when the match, and the farmers' race to follow, became known. Half the county was assembled on the appointed morning, an off-day with the Pytchley. Godfrey Parndon was judge, and had picked the ground—a figure of 8, with 17 fences, large but fair for the most part; the horses were to traverse it twice, missing the brook (16 feet clear of water) the second time.

I wish they were not getting so rare, those purely country-meetings, where three wagons with an awning make the grand stand; where there are no ring men to force the betting and deafen you with their blatant proffers—'to lay agin anything in the race;' where the bold yeomen, in full confidence that their favourite will not be 'roped,' back their opinions manfully for crowns.

Livingstone's great local renown, and the reputation of the Axeine for strength and speed (though no one knew how fast he *could* go), made the betting 5 to 4 on him; but takers were not wanting, calculating on the horse's truly Satanic temper. Miss Bellasys, who, with her mother, had arrived at Kerton the night before, laid half a point more—*not* in gloves—on the heavy-weight.

The bell for saddling rang, and the horses came out. The mare stripped beautifully, as fine as a star—no wonder her mistress was proud of her; and I think she had to the full as many admirers as the Axeine.

The latter was a dark chestnut with a white fetlock, standing full 16 hands (while the mare scarcely topped 15), well ribbed up, with a good sloping shoulder, immense flat hocks, and sinewy thighs; his crest and forehand were like a stallion's; and when you looked at his quarters, it was easy to believe what the Revesby stablemen said,—'They could shoot a man into the next county.'

He was 'orkarder than usual that morning' the groom remarked; perhaps he did not fancy the crowd without the hounds, for he kept lashing out perpetually, with vicious backward glances from his red eyes.

Then the riders showed: Livingstone in his own colours, purple and scarlet cap, workmanlike and weather-stained; Forrester in the fresh glories of light blue with white sleeves, his cap quartered with the same.

Charley lingered a minute by Miss Raymond's side, taking her last instructions, I suppose: she looked very nervous and pale—her jockey pleasantly languid as ever.

The instant the chestnut was mounted he reared, and indulged in two or three 'buck-jumps' that would have made a weaker man tremble for his back-bone, and then kicked furiously: but Guy seemed to take it all as a matter of course, sitting square and erect; all he did was to drive the sharp rowels in repeatedly, bringing a dark blood spot out with each stroke. It was not by love, certainly, that he ruled the Axeine. Then came the preliminary gallops: the mare going easily on her bit, gliding over the ground smoothly and springily; the horse shaking his head, and every now and then tearing madly at the reins, without being able to gain a hair's breadth on the iron hands that never moved from his withers.

'They're off!' Guy taking the lead; well over the first two fences, fair hunting ones; the third is a teaser—an ugly black bullfinch with a ditch on the landing side, and a drop into a ploughed field. The chestnut's devil is thoroughly roused by this time. When within sixty yards of the fence, he puts on a rush that even his rider's mighty muscles cannot check: his impetus would send him through a castle wall; but he hardly rises at the leap, taking it, too, where there is a network of growers—a crash that might be heard in the grand stand—and horse and man are rolling in the field beyond.

Flora Bellasys strikes her foot angrily with her riding-whip, and turns very pale.

Ten lengths behind, the mare comes up, well in hand, and slips through the bullfinch without a mistake—hardly with an effort—just at the only place where you can see daylight through the blackthorn.

What is Guy doing? Even in that thundering fall he has never let the reins go. Horse and rider struggle up together. A dozen arms are ready to lift him into the saddle, and a cheery voice says in his ear, 'Hold up, Squire; keep him a-going, and you'll catch the Captain yet!' He hardly hears the words though, for his head is whirling, and he feels strangely sick and faint; but before he has gone a hundred yards his face has settled into its habitual resolute calmness, only there is a thin thread of blood creeping from under his cap, and his brow is bent and lowering.

A fall, which would have taken the fight out of most horses, has only steadied the Axeine; and as we watch him striding through the deep ground, casting the dirt behind him like a catapult, we think and say, 'The race is not over yet.'

They are over the brook without a scramble: Forrester still leads, riding patiently and well. He knows better than to force the running, even with the difference in weight; for the going is too heavy quite to suit his mare.

As Livingstone passed the spot where Miss Raymond was stationed, he turned half round in his saddle and looked curiously in her face. She did not even know he was near; all her soul was in her eyes, that were gazing after Forrester with an anxiety so disproportioned to the occasion, that her cousin fairly started.

'Poor child!' he said to himself, all his angry feelings changing, 'she seems to have set her heart so upon winning, it would be sad if she were disappointed. No one has much on it: shall I try "Captain Armstrong" for once? It would make her very happy. Bar accidents, I must win. They don't know that the chestnut has not extended himself yet.'

We lose sight of the horses for a little. When we see them again, the mare has decidedly gained ground; and, to our astonishment, the Axeine swerves, and refuses at rather an easy fence.

Miss Bellasys' cheek flushes this time. She goes off at a sharp canter through a gate that takes her into a field where the horses must pass her close; several of her attendants follow. Charley comes up, looking rather more excited and happy than usual. He has made the pace better for the last half mile, and still seems going at his ease. More than a distance behind is the chestnut, evidently on bad terms with his jockey ; he is in a white lather of foam, and changes his leg twice as he approaches. Guy has his face turned slightly aside, as he nears the spot where Miss Bellasys waits for him, in the midst of her body-guard. For the first time, since the race began, her voice was heard, cutting the air with its clear mocking tones, like the edge of a Damascus sabre—'The chestnut wins—hard held!'

Guy's kindly impulses vanished instantly before the sarcasm latent in those last two words. He could sacrifice his own victory and the hopes of his backers, but he would not give a chance to Flora's merciless tongue. We saw him change his hold on the reins, and, with a shake and a fierce thrust of the spurs, he set the Axeine fairly going.'

Every man on the ground, including his late owner (who hated himself bitterly at that moment for parting with him), was taken by surprise by the extraordinary speed the horse displayed. He raced up to Bella Donna just before the last fence, at which she hangs ever so little, while he takes it in his swing, covering good nine yards from hoof to hoof. Nothing but hurdles now between them and home. The down-hill run-in favours his vast stride. A thousand voices echo Flora's words, 'The chestnut wins!' Charley made his effort exactly at the right time, and the brave little mare answered gallantly; but it was not to be. He shook his head, and never touched her with whip or spur again.

The race was over. No one disputed the judge's fiat: 'The Axeine by six lengths.'

Up to the skies went the hats and the shouts of the sturdy yeomen, who 'know'd he couldn't be beat,' exulting in the success of their favourite. Round winner and loser crowded their friends, congratulating the one, condoling with the other; praising both for their riding. At that moment I do not think any one, except myself, remarked Isabel Raymond, who sat somewhat apart, her tears falling fast under her veil, as she looked upon her lost ring.

Just then Forrester rode up. 'Woe to the vanquished!' he said. 'All is lost but honour. Will you say something kind to me, after my defeat, Miss Raymond? You will find your pet not punished in the least, and without a scratch on her.'

Without answering she held out her hand. As he bent over it, and whispered, what I could not hear, I saw her eyes sparkle, and a happy consciousness flush her cheeks, till they glowed like a sky at sunset when a storm is passing away in the west. Then I knew that he had won a richer prize than ever was set on a race, since the first Great Metropolitan was run for at Olympia.

Livingstone had washed away the traces of his fall (his wound was only a cut under the hair, above the temple), and was going to get the horses in line, to start them for the farmer's cup. As he passed Miss Bellasys he checked his horse for an instant, and said, very coldly—

'You are satisfied, I trust?'

'All's well that ends well,' answered Flora; 'but I began to tremble for my bets. I thought you were waiting too long.'

Guy did not wish to pursue the subject apparently, for he rode on without reply. Flora made no attempt to detain him; she had studied the signs of the times in his countenance long enough to be weather-wise, and to know that the better part of valour was advisable when the quicksilver had sunk to Stormy.

The cup was a great success. Eleven started, and three made a most artistic finish—scarcely a length between first and third. The farmers of the present day ride very differently from their ancestors of fifty years ago, whose highest ambition was to pound along after the slow, sure 'currant-jelly dogs.'

Go down into the vale of Belvoir, watch one of the Duke's tenants handing a five-year old over the Smite, and say if the modern agriculturists might not boast with Tydides—

ἡμεῖς δὴ πατέρων μέγ' ἀμείνονες εὐχόμεθ' εἶναι.

They are getting so erudite, too, that I dare say they would quote it in the original.

When all was over, and they were returning to Kerton, Guy ranged up to his cousin's side. He looked rather embarrassed and penitent; an expression which sat upon his stern, resolute face very strangely. But Isabel was radiant with happiness, and did not even sigh as she held out the forfeited ring. He put it back with a decided gesture of his hand, and, leaning over her, whispered something in her ear. I don't know how they arranged it; but Miss Raymond wore the turquoises at the next county ball—the ring, to her dying day.

CHAPTER X.

Souvent femme varie ;
Bien fol est, qui s'y fie.

We sat by the firelight in the old library of Kerton Manor. The dreary January evening was closing in, with a sharp sleet lashing the windows and rattling on their diamond panes; but the gleams from the great burning logs lighted up the dark-crimson cushions of Utrecht and the polished walnut panels so changefully and enticingly, that no one had the heart to think of candles.

All the younger members of the party were assembled there, with Mrs Bellasys to play propriety. It was her mission to be chaperon-in-ordinary to her daughter and her daughter's friends, and she went through with it, admirable in her patient self-denial. May they be reckoned to her credit hereafter—those long hours, when she sat, sleepy, weary, uncomplaining, with an aching head but a stereotyped smile.

Let us speak gently of these maternal martyrs, manœuvring though they be. If they have erred, they have suffered. I knew once a lady with a lot of six, nubile, but not attractive, all with a decided bias towards Terpsichore and Hymen. Fancy what she must have endured with those plain young women round her, always clamouring for partners, temporary or permanent, like fledglings in a nest for food. Clever and unscrupulous as she was—they called her the 'judicious Hooker,'—she must have been conscious of her utter inability to satisfy them. She knew, too, that if, by any dispensation, one were removed, five daughters of the horse-leech would still remain, with ravenous appetites unappeased. Yet the poor old bird was cheerful, and sometimes, after supper, would chirp quite merrily. *Honneur au courage malheureux.* Let us stand aside in the cloak-room, and salute her as she passes out with all the honours of war.

Mrs Bellasys was a little woman, who always reminded me of a certain tropical monkey—name unknown. She wore her hair bushily on each side of her small face, just like the said intelligent animal, and had the same eager, rather frightened way of glancing out of her beady black eyes, accompanied by a quick turning of the head when addressed. She had had her full share of troubles in her time; but she took them all contentedly—not to say complacently,—as part of the day's work. Her husband was not a model of fidelity; nor, indeed, of any of the conjugal or cardinal virtues. He was a sort of Maëlstrom, into which fair fortunes and names were sucked down, only emerging in unrecognizable fragments. His own would have gone too, doubtless; but he had been lucky at play for a long time—too constantly so, some said,—and a pistol-bullet cut him short before he had half spent his wife's money, so that she was left comfortably off, and her daughter was a fair average heiress. She had long ago abdicated the government in favour of Flora, who treated her well on the whole, *en bonne princesse.*

It is an invariable rule that, if there is a delicate subject which we determine beforehand to avoid, this particular one is sure imperceptibly to creep into the conversation

Mr Bruce was to arrive before dinner, an event which we guessed would not add materially to the comfort of two of our party (how silent those two were in their remote corner where the firelight never came!), so of course we found ourselves talking of ill-assorted marriages.

'You count *mésalliances* among such!' Guy asked, at length. 'Yes, you are right; but I know a case where "a man's being balked in his intention to degrade himself" ruined him for life. Ralph Mohun told me of it. It was a nine-days' wonder in Vienna soon after he joined the Imperial Cuirassiers. A Bohemian Count flourished there then; a great favourite with every one, for he was frank and generous, like most boys well born and of great possessions, who have only seen things in general on the sunny side. While down at his castle for the shooting, he fell in love with the daughter of one of his foresters. The man was a dull, brutal cur, and when drunk especially savage. His daughter was rarely beautiful; at all events, the Count, a good judge, thought her peerless.

'He meant fairly by the girl from the first, and promised her marriage, actually intending to keep his word. Still there were arrangements to be made before he could introduce such a novel element into blood that for centuries had been pure as the *sangue azzura.* He went up to Vienna for that purpose, leaving his design a profound secret to all his dependents. If these thought about it at all, they probably believed their master's intentions to be—like Dick Harcourt's towards the Irish lady—"strictly dishonourable."

'One night during his absence shrieks came from the cottage where the forester lived alone with his daughter. Those who heard them made haste; but it was a desolate spot, far from any other dwelling, and they came too late.

'They found the girl lying in her blood, not a feature of her pretty face recognizable. Near her were the butt of a gun shivered, and her father senselessly drunk. He had evidently finished the bottle after beating her to death.

'Whether it was merely an outbreak of his stupid ferocity, or whether she had exasperated him by her threats and taunts, for she was of a haughty spirit, poor child! and perhaps rather elevated by the thought of the coming coronet, will never be known. The murderer was in no state to make a confession, and he remained obstinately silent in prison till his lord's return.'

'How very horrible!' Mrs Bellasys cried out, shuddering; 'was not the Count very angry?'

'Well, he *was* rather vexed,' replied Guy, coolly. 'They are high justiciaries on their own lands, those great Bohemian barons, and so he gave the forester a fair trial. It was soon over; the man denied nothing, only whining out, in excuse, that he thought his daughter was dishonoured. The shadow of death was closing round him, and he was nearly mad with fear.

'The old steward saw a strange sort of smile twist his master's white quivering lips when he heard this; but he never said a word. I imagine he thought to reveal his purpose now that it was crushed, too great a sacrifice, even to clear the dead girl's fair fame: perhaps, though, he could not trust his voice, for he did not announce the sentence in words, but wrote it down: his hand shook very much, and it never carried a full glass unspilled to his mouth again.

'The court broke up at midday, and the man went straight, unconfessed, to the place of his punishment. They tied him to the tree nearest his own door, and the Count sat by while he howled his life out under the lash. He was hardly dead by sundown.'

'It was revenge, not justice,' Mrs Bellasys said, more firmly than was her wont. I saw the quick, impatient movement of her daughter's little foot; she did not appreciate her mother's moralities.

The answer came in the deepest of Livingstone's deep, stern tones.

'He was no saint, but a man, and a very miserable one; he acted according to his light, and in his despair caught at the weapon that was nearest to his hand. After all, the blood of a base, brutal hound, take it in what fashion you will, is a poor compensation for one life cut short in agony, and another blasted utterly.

'Mohun knew the Count's family. Some of them, maiden aunts, I suppose, were devotees of the first order; these came in person, or sent their pet priests, to argue with him on his unchristian habits of sullen solitude. The men of his old set came too, to laugh him out of the horrors. Saint and sinner got the same answer—a shake of the head, a curse, a threat if he were not left alone, growled out between deep draughts of strong Moldavian wine. They went, and were wise; for his pistols lay always beside him—in case his servants offended him, I suppose, or if he should take a sudden fancy to suicide,—and the shaking finger could have pulled a trigger still.

'After a little, he left Vienna, shut himself up in his castle, and would see no one.

'In England they would have tried at the "*de lunatico*" statute, but his next of kin left him in peace, biding their time as patiently as they could; they had not to wait long: in four years a good constitution broke up, suddenly at last; and the Count exchanged stupor for a sleep with his fathers, without benefit of clergy. Perhaps they would not have given him absolution, for he died certainly not in charity with all men.'

'I don't know,' Mrs Bellasys objected, with a timid obstinacy; 'I cannot argue with you; but I am sure it was very wrong.'

I struck in to the meek little woman's rescue.

'That's right, Mrs Bellasys, don't let him put you down with the high hand; it's always his way when truth is against him; but I never knew him break down a stubborn fact yet.'

Guy turned upon me directly.

'Frank, I have often remarked in you, with pain, quite a feminine propensity to theorize. Women *will* do it. My dear Mrs Bellasys, don't look so dreadfully like an accusing angel about to bring me to book; you know I am a hopeless heretic. They get up a sort of *Memoria Technica* in early youth, and it clings to them all their life through. If they go astray they never cease proclaiming aloud that "they know it's very wrong:" though eminently unpractical, they think it due to themselves to pet certain abstract truths (circumstances don't affect them in the least), like that priestess of Cotytto, who said to the magistrate, through her tears,—"I may have been unfortunate, but I've always been respectable!" Sometimes principle gets the pull over passion, but, in such a case, regrets come as often afterwards as remorse does in the reverse. I was reading a French story the other day—' he checked himself, with a laugh. 'Bah! I am in the prosaic vein, it seems, anecdoting like the old knave of clubs.

'Will you go on?' Flora said, leaning over towards him, her eyes glittering in the firelight.

The thrill in her voice—strangely contagious it was—told how much she was interested. I do not wonder at it. There was only one man on earth for whom she had ever really cared—he sat beside her then—and, I believe, what attracted her most in him was the daring disregard of opinions, conventionalities, and more sacred things yet, which carried him on straight to the accomplishment of his thought or purpose. In those days, if either were an obstacle, he flinched no more before a great moral law than at a big fence.

'Well,' Guy went on, 'it is the simple history of

Fernande, an *ange déchue* of the Quartier Bréda. She had formed a connection with a man who suited her perfectly in every way, and they went on in happy immorality, till she found out that Maurice had a wife somewhere, a very charming person, who loved him dearly; perhaps she thought that the possession of two such affections by one man was *de luxe;* at all events, she cut him at once, refusing consistently to see him again. Maurice, after trying all other means to move her in vain, resorted to the expedient of a brain-fever. When his wife and mother saw him very near his end, they sent for Fernande, as a last resource. They ought to have preferred death to dishonour, of course; but, my dear Mrs Bellasys, they were not strong-minded. What would you have? There are women and women.

'She came and nursed him faithfully; when he got better, though still very weak, she took advantage of his unprotected position to inflict on him the longest lectures, replete with good sense and good feeling, as to his conjugal duties, proprieties, and so forth. He gave in at last, on the principle of "anything for a quiet life," and promised to behave himself like a decent head of a family. When the balance of power was thoroughly re-established, she left him; first entreating him, when he found himself really in love with his wife, and happy, to write and tell her so. This was to be her reward, you know. The others went to Italy, Fernande to a place she had in Brittany, where she put herself on a strict *régime* of penitence, attending matins regularly, and doing as much good in her neighbourhood as Lady Bountiful, or—my mother. In about a twelvemonth the letter came; Maurice was devoted to his wife, and great on the point of domestic felicity. Then Fernande went into her oratory, and prayed. What do you think was the substance of her prayer?'

'That she might go mad or die,' was the quick answer; it came from Flora Bellasys.

'How good of you,' Guy said, 'to let me finish that long story, when you knew it by heart!'

I think no ear but his and mine caught the whisper —'I never read or heard of it till now.'

He bent his head in assent, as if the intelligence did not surprise him much; and then spoke suddenly—

'Charley, will you make an observation? You have been displaying that incontestable talent of yours for silence long enough.'

Very seldom was Forrester taken by surprise, but this time his reply was not ready. There was an embarrassing pause, broken by a *Deus ex machinâ*—the butler announcing that Mr Bruce had arrived, and was in the drawing-room.

CHAPTER XI.

And now thou knowest thy father's will,
  All that thy sex hath need to know:
'Twas mine to teach obedience still—
  The way to love, thy lord may show.

From that dark distant corner I heard a sigh, ending in a nervous catching of the breath; and then a muttered word unpleasantly like an oath, as Forrester sprang to his feet.

Livingstone rose slowly.

'I'll go and receive him. Let Mr Raymond know, Wise. I suppose he will not care to see any one else before dressing-time; it must be near that now.'

As he passed his cousin, he whispered something inaudible to us; and I saw his heavy hand fall on Charley's shoulder, crushing him down again like a child.

Then Flora went to Miss Raymond, and asked her, with more kindness in her manner than usual, to come to her rooms for some tea; they always seriously inclined to the consumption of that cheerful herb about this hour. Isabel clung to her companion, as they went out, with a meek helplessness, which was sad to see.

Charley had vanished before them. After that first involuntary moment, he had become *nonchalant* as ever; so I remained alone to ruminate. I confess, after some thought, I was still in the dark as to where things would end.

The meeting had been got over somehow, for, when I came down before dinner, Bruce was sitting on a sofa by Miss Raymond's side.

Why does a man, in such a position, invariably look as if he were on the stool of repentance, expiating some misdeed of unutterable shame? He has sat by the same woman before, when it was only a strong flirtation; more eyes, curious and spiteful, were upon him then, and he met them with perfect self-possession. Now that he is in his right, why does he look blushingly uneasy, as if he would call on the curtains to hide him, and the cushions to cover him? Have any mortals existed, so good, or great, or wise, as to be exempt from that dreadful poll-tax levied on all males unprivileged to woo by proxy—the necessity of looking ridiculous from the moment their engagement is announced to that when they leave the church as Benedicts? I should like to have watched Burke, or Herschel, or the Iron Duke, or *any* Archbishop of Canterbury, through the ordeal of a recognized courtship. Would the dignity of the statesman, the sage, the soldier, or the saint, have been sustained? I trow not.

In truth it is a sight full of sad warning—that ever-recurring spectacle of an engaged man (the lady is always provokingly at her ease) in general society. His friends turn away in compassion and charity; the girls, whom he ought to have married and—didn't, look on, exchanging smiles with their mothers; it is their hour of savage triumph. The French manage things more comfortably, I think. The Promessi Sposi meet so seldom before the contract is signed; between sentence and execution the time is so brief, that there is little space for intermediate terrors.

Nature had not been bountiful to Mr Bruce in externals. He was very tall, with round shoulders, long, lean limbs, large feet and hands, and immense joints. There was a good deal of strength about him, but it wanted concentration and arrangement. His features were rather exaggerated and coarse in outline, with the high cheek-bones common on the north side of the Tweed; his hair of an unhappy vacillating colour that could not make its mind up to be red; and his eyes, that rarely met you fairly, of a light cold grey. About the mouth, in particular, there was a very unpleasant expression, alternately vicious and cunning.

I do not believe that his intimates, if he had any, in their wildest moments of conviviality, ever called him 'Jack;' nor his mother, in his earliest childhood, 'Johnnie.' Plain 'John Bruce,' was written uncompromisingly in every line of his face; just the converse of Forrester, whom old maids of rigid virtue, after seeing him twice, were irresistibly compelled to speak of as 'Charley.'

I wish some profound psychologist would give us his theory on the question of 'The influence of nomenclature on disposition and destiny.' It is all very well to ask 'What's in a name?' I think there is a great deal; and that our sponsors have much to answer for in indulging their baptismal fancies. Not to go into the subject (which some have already done without exhausting it), have you not remarked that Georgiana is always pretty and slightly sarcastic; that Isabella has large, soft, lustrous eyes—generally they are dark; that Fanny invariably flirts; and that Kate is decided in character, if not haughty?

Tragedy and comedy both are forced to observe these nominal proprieties. Who was it that illuminated his house, and had the church bells rung, on finding a name for his hero? We should never have believed in Iago's treacheries if he had appeared before us as simple 'James.'

The new arrival seemed to have chilled us all into stupidity. Dinner languished; and afterwards, Guy, after trying at first to be laboriously civil—the sense of duty was painfully evident—lapsed into silence, passing the claret rather faster than usual, so that

Mr Raymond, to his intense disgust, had to make an effort and force the conversation.

When we entered, Isabel was nestling under Miss Bellasys' wing, from which shelter she had to emerge at Bruce's request for some music. She went directly, and played several pieces that he asked for straight through, while he stood gravely behind her with a complacent air of proprietorship which was inexpressibly aggravating.

When her task was done she went back to her sofa again; there she was safe, for all Bruce's devotion to his ladye-love, and stubbornness of character, could not give him courage enough to affront, at close quarters, the mingled dislike and scornful humour that played round Flora's lips, and gleamed in her eyes, like summer lightning. He had to retreat upon Lady Catherine, who, thinking him hardly used, in her inextinguishable charity exerted herself to entertain him.

We were all glad when that first evening was over, and we got into the smoking-room, whither Mr Bruce was not entreated to follow. It was always an augury of foul weather in Livingstone's temper, when, instead of the decent evening cigar, he smoked the short black *brûle-gueule,* loaded to the muzzle with cavendish. He sat thus for some minutes, rolling out stormy puffs from under his moustache; and then broke out—

I haven't an idea what to do with him' (there was no need to name the object of his thoughts); 'I made up my mind to risk a horse or two, for of course he would have broken their knees; but when I offered him a mount, he thanked me, and said "He didn't hunt." It would have got him away from home at all events. Poor Bella! How heavy on hand she *will* find him!'

'Ah! and he might have come to a timely end over timber; Providence does interfere so benevolently sometimes.' This was Forrester's pious reflection.

'Well, that's over,' Guy went on. 'He must shoot, though; every one shoots, or thinks he does. We have all the pheasants to kill yet (by-the-by, Fallowfield comes over on Thursday for the Home Wood); that will keep him employed for some time; but it's only putting off the evil day. My match-making aunt, of blessed memory, how much she has to answer for! I hate to think of Bella's *mignonne* face alongside of that flinty-cheeked Scotchman's.'

'Don't be angry, Guy,' suggested Charley, with some diffidence; 'but, if it's not an impertinent question, do you think he ever tries to kiss your cousin?'

'I never thought of that,' replied Livingstone, not without an oath; 'there's another pleasant reflection. No; I should think not. He *is* ceremonious, to give the devil his due. I'll find out to-morrow, though, without making Bella blush. Miss Bellasys is sure to know. I saw them exchanging confidences all this evening; and I am certain there were instigations to rebellion. Flora would delight in an *émeute;* she's a perfect red republican, that girl.'

'The Opposition seems organizing,' I remarked; 'Ministers will find themselves soon, I fear, without a working majority.'

'Not unlikely,' said Guy, filling another pipe; 'but they won't resign. Some men never know when they are beaten. Well; he who lives will see. If this wind lasts, we shall have a cracker from Lilbourne to-morrow. You ride the young one, don't you, Charley?'

CHAPTER XII.

A life whose waste
Ravaged each bloom by which its path was traced,
Sporting at will, and moulding sport to art,
With that sad holiness—the human heart.

It is a bright, crisp morning, and there is a gathering round the hall door of Kerton Manor.

To the right is Sir Henry Fallowfield, already established on the broad back of his shooting pony, an invaluable animal, that can leap or creep wherever a man can go, and steady under fire as old Copenhagen. The Baronet is very gouty. The whip made out of his favourite vices cuts him sharply at times, and he does not like it alluded to. I never saw him look so savage at Guy as when the latter quoted, '*Raro antecedentem scelestum Deseruit pede pœna claudo.*' Of course, he cannot walk much; but, placed in a ride, or at the corner of a cover, he rolls over the hares, and pulls down the pheasants unerringly as ever; when you come up, you will find him surrounded by a semicircle of slain, and not a runner among them.

The battle of life has left its tokens on the face of the strong, skilful Protagonist. The features, once so finely cut, are somewhat full and bloated now; but it is a magnificent ruin, and there are traces yet of 'the handsomest man of his day.' Very expressive are his glances still; a little too much so, some people think, when he is criticising a figure or a face; but, to do him justice, *gourmandise* is his pet weakness now, a comparatively harmless one; and a delicate *entremet* will bring the light into his eyes that only war or love could do in the old days.

By Sir Henry's side, encouraging him with great prophecies of sport, stands Mallet, the head-keeper. What a contrast his fresh honest face makes with the veteran *roué's!* He is the elder of the two by a good ten years, and there is scarcely a wrinkle on his ruddy cheeks and smooth forehead. Wind and weather have used him with a rough kindness, and his foot is almost as light, his hand quite as heavy, as when he entered the service of Guy's grandfather half a century ago. For generations his family have been devoted to the preservation of game; his six stalwart sons are all eminent in that line; and the 'Kerton breed' of keepers is renowned throughout the Midland shires. He is a prime favourite with the village children and their mothers, for, in all respects, save one, his heart is as soft as a woman's; to poachers it is as the nether mill-stone. There is the stain of a 'justifiable homicide' on the old man's hands—the blood of an antagonist slain in fair fight, in those rough times when the forest was, and marauders came out by scores to strike its deer. I do not think the deed has weighed heavily on his conscience (though he never has spoken of it since), or troubled his healthy, honest slumbers.

To the left is Guy, repressing the attentions of four couple of strong red and white spaniels, but *not* those of Miss Bellasys, who, standing at the oriel window of the library, is good-natured enough to fasten the band of his wide-awake for him, which has come undone. As he stands with his towering head a little bent, murmuring the 'more last words,' Sir Henry contemplating the picture with much satisfaction, smacks his lips, and suggests 'Omphale.'

Last of all, Mr Raymond comes slowly down the staircase, followed by his son-in-law that is to be. Forrester and I have been ready long ago, so we start.

Bruce did shoot, certainly, if discharging his gun on the slightest provocation constituted the fact; but he shot curiously ill. Indeed, he might have formed a pendant to that humane sportsman who, having taken to rural sports, *sero sed serio*, said, in extreme old age, 'that it was a satisfaction to him to reflect that he could not charge himself with having been, wittingly, the death of more than a dozen of his fellow-creatures.'

It was a problem whereon Mallet ruminated gravely long afterwards—'Wherever Mr Bruce's shot do go to?'—he could not conceive so much lead being dispersed in the atmosphere without a more adequate result. This want of dexterity, too, was thrown into strong relief that day; for all the other men, putting myself out of the question, were rare masters of the art.

Livingstone headed the list, though Fallowfield ran him hard. He got the most shots, indeed; for his knowledge of the woods and great strength, enabled him always to keep close to the spaniels. He was a sight to marvel at, as he went crashing through bramble and blackthorn, with a long even stride, just as if he had been walking through light springs.

At the end of the day we were all assembled outside the cover, where the game was being counted, except Bruce, who was still in the wood. A stray shot every now and then gave notice of his approach.

> 'We heard but the distant and random gun,
> That the foe was sullenly firing,'

Guy quoted, laughing.

'Random!—you may say that,' remarked Fallowfield. 'That man ought to be in a glass case, and ticketed: he's a natural curiosity. His bag to-day consists of one hare, one hen, and one—sex unknown, for no one saw it rise or tried to pick it up; it was blown into a cloud of feathers within six feet of his muzzle. Here he comes; don't ask him what he's done—it's cruelty.'

Bruce came up to us, looking rather more discontented than usual, but not nearly so savage as the keeper who had attended him all day, who immediately retreated among his fellows to relieve himself, by many oaths, of his suppressed disgust and scorn. They offered him beer, but it was no use. I heard him growl out, 'That there muff's enough to spile one's taste for a fortnit.'

It was the hour of the wood-pigeons coming in to roost, and several were wheeling over our heads at a considerable height.

'There's something for you to empty your gun at, Bruce,' Mr Raymond said, pointing to one that came rather nearer than the rest.

He was levelling, when Forrester cried out, 'Five-and-twenty to five on the bird!'

'Done!' answered Bruce, as he pulled the trigger. It was a long and not very easy shot, but the pigeon came whirling down through the branches with a broken pinion.

'You are unlucky in your selection, Captain Forrester,' the successful shot remarked coolly. 'You might have won a heavy stake by laying the same odds all day.'

'It serves you right,' interposed Guy, 'for speaking to a man on his shot. Don't you remember quarrelling with me, the other day, for doing so, Charley?'

Charley's face of perplexity and disgust was irresistible. We all laughed. 'What a *guignon* I have!' he said. 'Mr Raymond, I believe you were in the robbery.'

'Not I,' was the answer. 'I was as much surprised as any one. I think,' he went on, lowering his tone, 'Guy is right; he changed his aim as you spoke, involuntarily, or he *must* have missed.'

Then we turned homewards, through the twilight.

I do not know if the reminiscence of his lost 'pony' was rankling in Forrester's mind, or if he was only affected by the presence of Sir Henry Fallowfield—an immoral Upas, under whose shadow the most flourishing of good resolutions were apt to wither and die; but certainly, after dinner, he broke through the cautious reserve which he had always in public maintained towards Miss Raymond since Bruce's arrival. He not only talked to her incessantly, but tempted her to sing with him, during which performance they seemed rapidly lapsing into the old confidential style.

Bruce sat apart, the shades on his rugged face gradually deepening from sullenness into ferocity; he looked quite wolfish at last, for it was a habit he had to show his white teeth more when he was savage than when he smiled. But the music went on its way rejoicing,

> Unconscious of their doom,
> The little victims played.

Isabel was too happy, and Charley too careless to be prudent. Once I caught his glance as it crossed with Bruce's scowl. There was an expression on his pleasant face that few men had ever seen there, approaching nearly to an insolent defiance. Looking at those two, a child might have known that between them there was bitter hate.

But what of that? Are not the laws of society and the amenities of civilized life supreme over such trifles as personal animosities? How many women are there who never meet without mingling in a close embrace, when each is to the other a Brinvilliers in heart? My gentle cousin Kate, only last night I saw you greet your intimate enemy. It was the most gushing thing I ever imagined. The kisses were profuse and tantalizing in the extreme; yet I wis, if thoughts could kill, dearest Emma's neck would have been safer in the hug of a Norway bear than in the clasp of your white willowy arms.

Are there not men, sitting constantly at each other's tables, who, in the Golden age, when people spoke and acted as they felt, would only have encountered at the sword's point?

If we hear that our mortal foe is ruined irretrievably, we betray no indecorous exultation, but smile complacently, and say, 'we are not surprised;' or, if we have the chance, give him a last push to send him over the precipice on whose brink he is staggering.

But as for any violent demonstration—bah! the *Vendetta* is going out of fashion, even in Corsica, now-a-days; only on the boards of the 'Princess's' does it have a run.

It is better so. Is it not far more creditable and less ridiculous, for two of our reverend seniors, between whom there exists a deadly feud, to comport themselves with decent reserve towards each other, than to go vapouring about on crutches, stamping the foot that is not gouty, and blaspheming in a weak, cracked treble, like Capulet and Montague? Hot rooms and cold draughts are dangerous, but not so fatal as the Aqua Tofana, and other pleasant beverages more revolting and rapid in their effects. Could anything be more harrowing to a well-regulated mind than to see, in the midst of a neatly-turned compliment, one's partner literally *look black* at one, and expire incontinently in great torments?

It is less romantic, but I prefer to be given an unmedicated rose. When I win a pair of gloves, it is a satisfaction to me to reflect that in Houbigant or Pivert there is no venom or guile.

All these consoling thoughts, and more, passed through my mind that evening; yet I could not get rid of a strange, indistinct impression that it was only the presence of Livingstone which averted some great danger imminent over his cousin and Forrester.

CHAPTER XIII.

> This is all
> The gain we reap, from all the wisdom sown
> Through ages. Nothing doubted those first sons
> Of time; while we, the school'd of centuries,
> Nothing believe——.

We were scattered round the smoking-room, about midnight, in different attitudes of repose. Bruce was of the party, decidedly out of his element. He did not like tobacco much, and only took a cigar as a sacrifice to the exigences of the occasion, consuming the same with great toil and exertion of the lungs, and when he removed it from his lips, holding it at arm's length, like a viper or other venomous beast.

'Charley,' asked Fallowfield, at length, from the depths of his divan, 'how is the regiment going on? Insolvent as ever?'

'More so,' was the reply. 'When I came away they were thinking of framing a £5 note, and hanging it up in the ante-room, to show that we had *some* money—just like the man who pitched loaves over the city-walls when they were dying of famine—but there was a difficulty about procuring one. However we have been promised the son of an opulent brewer or distiller (I forget which, but I know he makes something to drink), who is to join before Easter. Perhaps he may set us afloat again.'

'Yes!' Guy remarked; 'fortunately a martial spirit is abroad in the Third Estate. *Walbrook s'en va t'en guerre.* If there is one moneyed man in the lot, it seems sufficient to keep the others going. I often wonder how you manage; for, to do you justice, you don't plunder your Crœsus. You deserve statues —as Sydney Smith would have said—*æris alieni.*'

'I am not the rose, but I have lived with her,' responded Forrester, sententiously. 'That's the principle of the thing. When a subaltern arrives laden with gold, the barrack-yard is a perfect garden of Bendemeer to the tradesmen.'

'I believe it is precisely such regiments, remarked Bruce, 'that the political economists have in view when they attack the army estimates.'

The observation was aggressive; but Charley's countenance was unruffled as the Dead Sea, as he answered—'Personal, but correct. You are intimate with Joseph Hume, probably? You look as if you were.' (These last words were a stage aside; not quite so inaudible as could be wished.) 'I think we should fight, if we had a chance, though.'

His lip wore a curious smile, and he raised himself on his arm to look the last speaker full in the face.

'Of course you would,' broke in Sir Henry; 'that's not a peculiarity of crack regiments or second sons. It's only in their baptism of fire that the young ones shrink and start; after that, the meekest of men develop themselves wonderfully. I heard an old Indian, the other day, speak of a case in point.

'There was an officer in his service, mild and stupid to a degree. He had been a butt all his life; bullied at school, at Addiscombe, and in his corps worst of all.

'They were attacking a hill-fort, and the fire from wall-pieces and matchlocks was so heavy that the storming party would not face it. Amongst those who retreated were two of his superior officers and chief tormentors. The junior lieutenant saw them cowering away to seek shelter, and laughed out loud; then he flung his shako before him into the fort, and led the sepoys back to the charge, and right over the breastwork—bare-headed and cheering. He was shot down inside, and lived only a few hours, all the time in horrible agony; but Western told us that Bayard or Sidney could have made no braver or calmer ending.'

'You are right,' Livingstone said. 'The Roundheads fought fully as well as the Cavaliers. I only know of two instances where the thoroughbreds had the advantage of a contrast. One was when the Scottish regiment took the Island in the Rhine; the other was the exploit of the *Gants Glacés*. Don't you know it? It's worth hearing.

They were attacking some town in the wars of the Fronde. The breach was scarcely practicable, and the best of the besieging army had recoiled from it with great loss. The Black Mousquetaires stood by in all the coquetry of scarf, and plume, and fringed scented gloves, laughing louder at each repulse of the Linesmen. The soldiers heard them and gnashed their teeth. At last there was a murmur, and then a shout —“ *En avant les Gants Glacés !* ” They wanted to see “ the swells ” beaten too. Then the Household Brigade went up and carried the breach, leaving a third of their number on it. The general in command made the whole army defile past their *guidon*, and salute it with sloped standards.

‘No ! very few men are physical cowards in battle, whatever they may be across country. I don’t believe Paris was, when he ran from Menelaüs ; and Helen did not think so, though she teased him about it, or she would never have spoken to him again. I rather imagine his feeling was that of a certain guardsman of our acquaintance, who said, declining the ordeal of combat, that “ his first duty was to his partners, and this did not allow him to risk a black eye.” ’

‘Might not remorse at the sight of the man he had injured have had something to do with his flight ?’ Bruce asked.

He was full of moral sentiments—that man. Only you could not look at him without fancying that they sprang more from an inclination to be contradictious and disagreeable, than from any depth of principle.

'Absurd,' Guy retorted. 'Wasn't he a heathen, and rather an immoral one? It was of profligates with far greater advantages of education that some one said:—"*Le remords naît de l'abandon, et non de la faute.*" The walls of Troy were strong then, and the Destroyer-of-ships safe behind them; "getting herself up alarmingly" for his return. No wonder Menelaüs was eager for the duel: he was staking his loneliness against Paris' nine points of the law.'

Sir Henry Fallowfield smiled approvingly.

'Yes!' he observed; not answering what had been said, but evidently following out a train of his own thought. 'Modern exquisites have courage, and self-possession, and conceit—great elements of success with women, I own—but they have not much more. I am certain, Charley, who is a favourable specimen of the class, often affects silence because he has nothing on earth to say. There is a decadence since my younger days (I hope I speak dispassionately), and how very far we fell short of the *roués* of the Régence! We could no more match them than a fighting-man in good training could stand up to one of the old Pict giants. Look at Richelieu: good at all points,—in the battle, in the boudoir, in the Bastille,—a dangerous rival at the two ages of ordinary men's first and second childhood.

'He was a great man in his way,' I assented. 'Do you remember his answer to the Duchesse de Maine, when she asked him, for a political purpose, if he could remain faithful for one week to an intrigue then twenty-four hours old?—"*Madame, quand une fois j'embrasse un parti, je suis capable des plus grandes sacrifices pour le soutenir.*" The object of that heroic constancy was the Maréchale de Villars, one of the loveliest women in France. It was the sublime of fatuity—was it not?'

'Well, I don't know,' said Charley, settling himself comfortably in his cushions, and glancing almost imperceptibly at Bruce; 'they seem to fancy us notwithstanding. We have only one great obstacle,—the mothers that *bore* us.'

Be it known that 'they,' used simply, stood in his vocabulary for the fair sex in general.

'Nonsense,' replied Fallowfield; don't be so ungrateful. You don't know what you owe to those anxious parents. It helps you enormously, being the objects of perpetual warnings from husbands and chaperons; the first considering you *mauvais sujets*, the last *mauvais partis;* for you *are* "detrimentals," for the most part, you will own.'

'*Vetitum ergo cupitum,*' interrupted Livingstone. 'A good many moralists before and since old Rabelais have discoursed on that text. The Chief of Errington was probably much more agreeable, besides being a better match, than Jock of Hazeldean, who, clearly was what an old Frenchman lately described to me—" *un vaurien, mon cher, qui court les filles et qui n'a pas le son.*" But then poor Frank was the government candidate, so, of course, in a popular election, he went to the wall.'

Sir Henry's face grew more pensive and grave, as he said, 'It is very hard on the women, certainly, that our race should have degenerated so ; for I believe in my conscience they are as clever and wicked, and appreciate temptation as much as ever.' (The gusto with which he said this is indescribable.) 'There is the Bellasys, for instance, with a calculating sensuality, an astuteness of stratagem, an utter contempt of truth, and a general aptitude for making fools of men, that poor Philip the Regent would have worshipped. When she had no one better to corrupt, I have seen her take in hand an older, sadder, wiser, uglier man than myself, and in three days bring him to the verge of insanity ; so that he would scowl at his wife, his companion for forty years, the blameless mother of six grown-up children, with a hideous expression indicative of carving-knives and strychnine. Guy suits her best. His thews and sinews awe her a little sometimes ; and he has a certain hardness of character and pitilessness of purpose, improved by my instructions, which will carry him far, but not far enough, I think. You're right not to look flattered' (Guy's face had moved no more than the marble Memnon's) ; 'you are only a shade better than the rest. Our effete world is not worthy of that rare creature: she was born a century too late.'

'I quite differ with you,' Bruce said, in his harshest voice; 'I am certain the great plurality of the women of our day would resist any temptation, from fear of the consequences, if not from principle.'

Fancy the feelings of the Greek Professor interrupted in his lecture by a controverting freshman, and you will have some idea of Fallowfield's. His eye lighted on the last speaker, glittering like a hooded snake's, as it were caressing him with a lambent scorn.

I never guessed how much sneering provocation could reside in tones usually so very soft and musical, till I heard him answer, 'I suppose you *do* differ with me. We probably both speak from experience. On one point you are scarcely practical, though. You think you can frighten a woman into propriety. Try it.'

'Are you not too general in your strictures or encomiums?' I suggested, wishing to relieve the awkwardness which ensued; 'surely there are many instances to the contrary. Take Lady Clanronald, for instance, married to a man her elder by twenty years, and not very clever or agreeable, I should think. No one ever breathed a whisper against her, and it has not been through default of aspirants.'

An evil smile curled round the old *roué's* sensual mouth, radiating even to the verge of the forest of his iron-grey whiskers.

'Clanronald not clever?' he replied. 'The cleverest man I know. He knew how his wife would be tempted, and he has taken the greatest pains to encourage a counteracting influence — family pride. Don't you know she was a Hautagne? It is a tradition with that race that their women never go wrong —under a Prince of the Blood. None of these are available just now; so she is still "*Une Madeleine dans la puissance de son mari, et dans l'impuissance de se repentir.*"'

It was worse than useless to argue with Fallowfield. All your own best hits were turned aside by the target of his cynicism and unbelief, while his sophistries and sarcasms often came home. Like old wounds, they would begin to shoot and rankle in after years, just when it was most important and profitable to forget them.

We separated soon after this. Sir Henry's face wore an expression of placid self-congratulation. He thought the conversation had been rather improving, I believe, and that some of the ideas and illustrations had been rather neatly put; so he laid his head down that night with the calm satisfied feeling of a good man who has done his duty, and not lost a day.

He was not more ingenious in overcoming the scruples of others than in silencing his own conscience; though, of late years, this last had probably ceased to give him much trouble. Finer feelings with him were only 'sensations morbidly exaggerated;' and he made no sort of allowance for such; amongst others, utterly ignoring remorse. I doubt if he ever looked forward; I am sure he never looked back. A parody on the 'tag' which was given to Cambronne, would sum up his terribly simple and consistent creed—*La femme se rend, mais ne meurt pas.*

CHAPTER XIV.

> I hold him but a fool, that would endanger
> His body for a girl that loves him not.

FALLOWFIELD left us the next morning; the Bellasys later in the same day. They were to pay divers visits and then return to Kerton. Lady Catherine pressed them to do so; though she liked the daughter less than the mother, she was so anxious Guy should marry some one, that I think she would have accepted even Flora with thankfulness.

It is a favourite delusion with the British parent that matrimony will work a miracle, and steady their children for life, by casting forth the *lutins* who beset them. A thousand failures have not convinced the good speculative matrons of the hazard of the experiment; nor will as many more do so; they will go on match-making and blundering to the end of time. For a very brief space the evil spirits are exorcised; but before the gloss is off the new-married couple's new furniture, one of the band creeps back and opens the door to his fellows. These hardly know their old quarters at first, but they soon begin to like them better than ever—are they not swept and garnished? 'So they enter in and dwell there, and'—I need not finish the sentence; a thousand sweet though somewhat shrill voices will save me that trouble—a doleful music—an ancient tale of wrong—the Song of the Brides! They used to say that a man never went so hard to hounds after entering the holy estate. If this be so, I fear it is the only comforting result which follows of course.

What Flora and Guy said to each other at parting I cannot guess. Neither was of the sentimental order, and both might have taken for their motto, 'Lightly won and lightly lost.' Her hand lingered somewhat long in his as they said farewell; but she was smiling, if anything, more saucily than ever. So she went, leaving behind her no tangible token, except a tiny pearl-coloured glove, which Guy twisted rather pensively between his fingers, as he stood on the hall-steps and watched the carriage disappear down the avenue. Mr Bruce exulted, after his saturnine fashion, and Isabel Raymond trembled; the one had lost a strong unscrupulous ally, the other a formidable enemy.

'Why don't you open those letters, Charley?' Livingstone asked at breakfast, next morning, pointing to a pile that lay unopened by the latter's plate.

'My dear boy, I haven't the heart to do it,' was the reply. 'They are all expressive, I know, of different phases of mercantile despair. I believe these men keep a Supplicant, as Moses maintains a Poet. The last appeal from my saddler was perfectly heartrending: he could not have written it himself, for he looks as tough as his own pig-skin. If he had, he would be *impayable* in more ways than one. What can I do? I can't come down on the poor old man who has the misfortune to be my father for more supplies, when rents are being reduced fifteen per cent. The tradesmen must learn to endure. They have a splendid chance of attaining the Victory of Suffering.'

Bruce smiled complacently to himself, and then superciliously at Charley. He had just received a letter from his banker, consulting him as to the disposal of a superfluous thousand or so, and he was hesitating between some dock shares and a promising railway.

'Yes,' Forrester went on, 'it's very well for you to talk in that hardened way, as you did the other night, about detrimentals and second sons. I wonder how you would like to have an elder brother, a pillar of learned societies, and as tenacious of life as one of his pet zoophytes? He used to consume quantities of medicine, which was encouraging; but lately he has taken to homœopathy, which was quite out of the match. He told me, lately, that "four hundred a year and my pay was affluence." Affluence!'

It is impossible to describe the cadence of plaintive indignation which he gave to the last word. The recollection of his wrongs had made him almost energetic; we listened to his eloquence in respectful surprise.

'It was adding insult to injury,' answered Guy. If parliament does not do something for you all soon, there will be another exodus of the Parthenidæ.

Charley looked at his friend admiringly, as he always did when Guy was classical in his allusions; but the unwonted effort had evidently exhausted him, and he lapsed into silence.

We rode out that afternoon to make some calls in the neighbourhood, and, in returning, Livingstone proposed a short cut through a line of gates, with a short interval of cross-country work.

His cousin looked delighted—Bruce decidedly uncomfortable; though, of course, he could not refuse. He was riding Kathleen, an Irish mare, one of the quietest in the Kerton stable, where none were very steady. The fences were nothing at first; at last we came to a brook. It was not broad, but evidently deep, with high, rotten banks. However, as we were going at a fair hunting pace, all, including Bella Donna and her mistress, took it in their stride, but pulled up at once, seeing that Bruce was left behind, with the groom who was following us.

The first time he came at it, it was a clear case of 'craning.' He was hauling nervously at the reins, and would not let the mare have it.

Guy regarded him with intense contempt. 'By G—d!' he muttered; 'I believe the man's afraid!'

Forrester laughed so unrestrainedly, that Isabel looked at him beseechingly, in evident dread of the consequences.

'My dear Miss Raymond,' he said, answering her frightened glance, 'don't alarm yourself. Do you think I am a Quixote, to war with windmills?'

No one could look at Bruce's long arms and legs, all working at once, without owning the aptness of the simile.

For the third time he came down at the brook, and, I really believe, meant going; but Kathleen, unused to such vacillating measures, had got sulky, and swerved on the very brink, almost sliding over it. Her rider lost his seat, rolled over her shoulder, and for an instant disappeared in the water.

Achelous or Tiber, emerging from his native waves, crowned with aquatic plants, presented, I doubt not, an appearance at once dignified and becoming; but I defy any ordinary non-amphibious mortal to look, under similar circumstances, anything but supremely ridiculous. The wrathful face framed in dripping hair and plastered whiskers—the movements of the limbs, awkward and constrained—the rivulets distilling from every salient angle, turning the victim into a walking Lauterbrunnen—when we saw all these absurdities exaggerated before us, no wonder that from the whole party, including the groom, there broke 'unnumbered laughters.'

'Curse the mare!' Bruce hissed out. The words came crushed and broken, as it were, through the white ranges of his grinding teeth.

Livingstone's face hardened directly. 'Swear as much as you think the circumstances require, or as my cousin will allow,' he said; 'but be just before you're generous—don't anathematize Kathleen. It was no fault of hers. I never saw her refuse before; but she is used to be put straight at her fences. Hold her still, Harry' (to the groom on the further side, who had caught the mare's rein), 'I'll ride her at it myself.'

He threw his bridle to Forrester, and, dismounting, cleared the brook at a bound. Then he went up to Kathleen, and began to coax her with voice and hand.

'I'll bet an even fifty he takes her over the first time,' said Charley.

Bruce nodded his head, without speaking, to show that he took the bet. I thought he had the best of it, for the mare was so savage and sulky still that a refusal seemed a certainty.

Guy had mounted by this time, and, after taking a wide sweep in the field, came down at the brook. Kathleen was curling her back up, and going short, with the most evident intention of balking; but swerving was next to impossible, for she was fairly held in a vice by her rider's hands and knees. The whip fell, heavily twice on either shoulder, and, just at the water's edge, Livingstone drove his heels in and lifted her. It was almost a standing leap, and as Kathleen landed, a great fragment of the bank went crashing into the water from under her hind hoofs, and she was down on her head; but Guy recovered her cleverly, and, turning again, sent her over twice, backwards and forwards. The first time, the mare did not try to refuse again, but rushed at it, snorting wrathfully, with her head in the air; the second, she was quite tamed, and took it evenly in her stride.

'Give Mr Bruce your horse, Harry, and take the Czar,' Guy said. 'I'll ride Kathleen home. Steady, old lady, don't fret. We are friends again now.'

'So you have got your pony back?' I remarked to Forrester.

'Yes, and with interest,' was the quiet reply. 'I don't think he will owe me much when I have done with him.'

Though I had nothing on earth to do with it, I felt something like compunction, as I guessed what he meant.

Bruce's was a hard, money-loving nature, unromantic to a degree; but I believe he would gladly have waked to find himself a houseless, landless beggar, if he could thus have regained what Charley, with his soft voice and eyes and manner, had stolen from him long ago.

Am I right in saying 'stolen'? Perhaps he never had it; at all events he thought he had, which comes to nearly the same thing.

It is true that, unravelling the cord of a man's existence, you will generally find the blackest hank in it twined by a woman's hand; but it is not less common to trace the golden thread to the same spindle.

Great warrior, profound statesman, stanch champion of liberty as he was, without Edith of the Swan's-neck, Harold would scarcely have risen into a hero of romance. We do not quite despise Charles VII. when we think how faithfully, in loneliness and ruin, the Lady of Beauty loved her apathetic, senseless, discrowned King. Others never found it out; but there must have been something precious hid in a dark corner of the wayward heart, near which Agnes nestled so long. We look leniently on Otho—parasite and profligate—when we see him lingering on his last march, on the very verge of the death-struggle, in the teeth of Galba's legions, to decorate Poppæa's grave. More in pity than in scorn, to be sure, did Tacitus, the historic epigrammatist, write—'*Ne tum quidem veterum immemor amorum.*'

Was it in remorseful consciousness of having inflicted a deep irreparable wrong, that Isabel rode so constantly by Bruce's side, striving, by all means of timid propitiation, to chase the cloud lowering on his sullen face, as we returned slowly home?

CHAPTER XV.

Τὸ δὲ προκλύειν,
'Επει γένοιτ' ἂν ἤλυσις, προχαιρέτω·
Ἴσον δὲ τῷ προστένειν,
Τορὸν γὰρ ἥξει σύνορθρον αὐγαῖς.

My stay at Kerton Manor was drawing to a close. I had lingered there too long already, and letters from neglected relatives and friends came, reproachful, with every post. The day before I went, Guy called me into his study.

'Frank,' he said, 'I am in a great strait of perplexity; my uncle has been attacking me this morning about Isabel and Charley. Bruce puts him up to it, of course.'

'I thought it would come; but why on earth did not Bruce speak to you, if not to Forrester himself? Perhaps it was from delicacy though. Let us hope so.'

'How philanthropic we are!' Guy retorted. 'I don't believe any other man would have spoken of delicacy and that rough-hewn log of Scotch fir in the same breath. My dear boy, the thing is as simple as possible—the man is a coward. He is as careful of that precious person of his, as if it were worth preserving; so he shoots his arrows from behind Uncle Henry's Telamonian shield. Nothing is so acute and right-judging as the instinct of fear. He knows that if he had a fancy for a quarrel, either Charley or I would be too happy to indulge him.'

'He can't be such a dastard,' I said.

'I am sure of it; but he is not the less dangerous for that. Such men are always the most unscrupulous in revenge. I have seen murder in his eyes a score of times in the last fortnight. If our lines had fallen in the pleasant Italian places, he would have invested twenty scudi long ago in hiring a dagger. As it is, civilization and the rural police stand our friends; but I have strongly advised Charley not to trust himself near him in cover. By G—d! I think, for once in his life, he would hold straight!'

'You don't like him, that's evident.'

The pupils of Livingstone's eyes contracted ominously; a lurid flash shot out from under his black, bent brows, and there came on his lip that peculiar smile that we fancy on the face of Homeric heroes—more fell, and cruel, and terrible than even their own frown—just before they levelled the spear. He laid his broad hand, corded across with a net-work of tangled sinews, on the table before him, and the stout oak creaked and trembled.

'If I were to strangle him,' he said, 'as I constantly feel tempted to do, I believe I should deserve well of the

State. But with all that, I don't like plotting against him under my own roof; it strikes me that is a phase of hospitality not strictly Arabian. My mother laments over him already, as hardly dealt with. Then Uncle Henry is a great difficulty. He is not in the least one of the light comedy fathers who, during two acts, stamps about with many strange oaths and stormy denials, but in the last yields to fate and *soubrettes*, says, 'Bless you, my children!' and hands out untold gold. There is no more appeal from his decisions than from Major A——'s. He dislikes Bruce, of course; but he would just as soon think of objecting to a partner at whist as to a son-in-law, because he happened to be unprepossessing. When the poor little Iphigenia is sacrificed on the shrine of expediency, you will see him, not veiling his face, but taking snuff with the calm grace that is peculiar to him. Arguing with such a man is a simple absurdity.'

'I cannot advise you,' I answered, sadly; 'but it seems hard on Miss Raymond, too.'

'Of course it is,' Livingstone broke in; 'and the worst of it is, the poor child looks to me to help her. I can't bear to think of what her life would be if she married Bruce. He would be constantly retaliating on her for what he is suffering now—for he does suffer. A pleasant idea that she, who is only meant to be petted, should be set up as a target for his jealousy and ill-humour! She would never be able to stand it, and Charley wouldn't if she could; and then there would be a *dénouement* like that which ruined Ralph Mohun. If there *is* to be a row, it had better come before than after marriage. It's more moral, and saves an infinity of trouble. I think Charley is better away, too, just now. Parndon wants us both to stay with him. We'll go; and so my conscience will stand at ease for the present. When we are on neutral ground I can help them; or, at all events, "let the justice of the king pass by."'

'Have you spoken to Forrester yet?'

'No! but he will do as I advise, and temporize, I am sure; though he would hardly give up Bella, even if I asked him. He means business, for once, evidently. They will have plenty of time to concert their plans before the summer. Charley wants no help in that. As to carrying them out—we shall see. Well! you will go to-morrow. I am very sorry, for all reasons. I hope you have not been much bored here. Kerton counts on you for next winter.'

I need not give my answer. I felt really loth to go; but, fortunately for my peace of mind, I could not guess at the changes that would be wrought in the hopes, the intentions, the destinies of all of us, before I should stand in the fine old manor-house again.

If adieus are painful in reality, they are intensely stupid on paper—a landscape without a foreground—so I spare you next morning's leave-takings.

Guy had said nothing to his cousin then of the plan he had determined on. I was glad of it. I was glad not to see, at parting, her sweet face so sad as, I am sure it became, when she heard that she was to struggle against Bruce's persecutions and her own antipathies, unaided and alone.

I wandered through many counties, and then went to Ireland. During the next few months I saw the faces I had left behind me many times, but only in my dreams.

CHAPTER XVI.

The only living thing he could not hate
Was reft at once—and he deserved his fate,
But did not feel it less;—the good explore
For peace, these realms where guilt can never soar;
The proud—the wayward—who have fixed below
Their joy, and find this earth enough for woe,
Lose in that one their all—perchance a mite—
But who in patience parts with all delight?

Pleasant days they were, when, through the soft spring weather, I wandered round the coasts of Kerry, Clare, and Galway; hooking salmon in broad pools, where the vexed water rests awhile from its labours under wooded cliffs, and at the tail of roaring rapids, specked with white foam-clots; or sea-trout, in the estuaries where the great rivers hurry down to their stormy meeting with the Atlantic rollers.

Everywhere I met the frank cheery welcome that you must cross the Channel to find in its perfection.

It is sad to see how widely over that fair land the abomination of desolation has cast its shadow. Many halls are tenantless besides those of Tara. The ancient owners of the soil—where are they? Not a country in Europe but is conscious of these restless, careless, homeless Zingari. In distant provincial towns of France, you hear their enormous blunders in grammar, and musical Milesian brogue, breaking the uniformity of dull legitimist *soirées.* Homburg and Baden are irradiated with the glory of their whiskers. You find their blue eyes and open handsome features diversifying the sameness of wooden-faced Austrian squadrons. Nay! has it not been whispered that the proudest name in Ireland attained a bad eminence in the Grecian Archipelago, as the captain of the wickedest of those long low craft that, in the purple dawn or ivory moonlight, steal silently out from behind the headlands of the Cyclades?

But let us do justice to those who remain behind.

The sceptre of Connemara has passed away from the ancient dynasty. If the penultimate monarch could rise from his peaceful grave, his place would know him no more. If he travelled through all his thirty miles of sea-board, the Scotch labourers would doff their hats more respectfully to the steward of the 'Law Life,' than to the humane old homicide. The royal writ, which he defied from his place at St Stephen's, might be served now, I imagine, without danger of the bailiff's breaking his fast on the same. Claret flows soberly from long-necked bottles whose corks bear the brand of the wine-merchant high priced and legal, instead of from the cask of which the snug sandy cove and the roguish-looking hooker could have told tales. But in spite of visionary rents, and poor-rates sternly real, the Irish squire still clings to the exercise of that hospitality which has been an heirloom with the Tribes since the days of Strongbow.

One of my longest halting places was at Ralph Mohun's, by whom, though personally unknown to him, I was made very welcome, as a friend of Guy's. My host deserves a more especial mention, for his history was a sad, though not an uncommon one.

He began life in a cavalry regiment, wherein he conducted himself with fair average propriety, till he met Lady Caroline Desborough. He fell in love with her—most people did,—but unluckily, when she married Mr Mannering, to whom she had been predestined since her *début*, he could not bring himself to wear the willow decently and in order, like her other disappointed admirers.

It was the old unhappy story: her husband neglected Lady Caroline consistently; ill-treated her sometimes. Mohun pursued his purpose with the relentless obstinacy of his character. Eighteen months after her marriage they fled together.

He was not rich; so that the trial which ensued, with its heavy damages, completely crippled him. The partner of his crime was absolutely penniless. They went to Vienna; and Ralph entered the Austrian cuirassiers, where he had some interest to push him. He had lingered some time within reach of England, to give Mannering an opportunity of demanding satisfaction. But the injured husband knew his man too well to trust himself within fifteen paces of Mohun's pistol. He chose a surer, safer revenge, in taking no steps to procure a divorce, and so debarring Ralph from his only means of atonement—marriage with his victim.

He varied the dull routine of seducers, it is true; for he never wearied of, or behaved unkindly to, the woman he had ruined. Time brought many troubles on them, but never satiety or coolness. To the very last he worshipped, and, to the utmost of his power, guarded her tenderly. Rough and hard and morose as he was to others, she never heard his lips utter one harsh word.

But she was of a proud, sensitive spirit, and had miscalculated her strength when she thought she could bear dishonour. After that duel with which Austria rang, in which the best *schlager* in his brigade fell, horribly mangled, the day after he had whispered a jest about Caroline Mannering, men were very cautious how they even looked askance at her; but the women—who could bridle their tongues, or blunt their scornful glances? Briareus, armed to the teeth, would not affright our modern dowagers, or deter them from their prey. Wherever the carcass of a fair fame lies, thither they flock, screaming shrilly in triumph, vulture-eyed, sharp-taloned—the Choosers of the Slain.

I pity from my heart the frailest, the most utterly fallen of her sex, when once the social Nemesis hands her over to the chorus of the Eumenides.

We deride the *subsignanæ* who line the wall; we make a mock at their old-fashioned whist; we risk jokes whereat our partners smile approvingly on their false fronts and wonderful head-gears; but may the wittiest of us never know by experience how much worse is the bite than the bark of the Veteran battalion!

Caroline Mannering had all this to contend with, for Vienna was a favourite resort in those days for the English, and she was constantly encountering some of her old set. She bore up bravely for a while, but it killed her. She never wearied her lover with her self-reproach, but crushed back her sorrows into her heart, and met him always with a gentle smile. That same smile contrasted so sadly, at last, with the wan, worn features, that it often made him bend his bushy brows to conceal the rising tears.

If her destiny had been different; if she had died ripe in years, after a life spent in calm matronly happiness, with all that she loved best round her, would she have been nursed so tenderly, or mourned so bitterly, by the nearest and dearest of them all, as she was by her tempter to sin? I think not. I believe that in all the world there never was a greater sorrow than that which Mohun endured, as he saw his treasure slowly escaping him; never a desolation more complete and crushing than that which fell upon him as he stood by her corpse, with dry eyes, folded arms, and a heavy, frowning brow. It was not only that he felt her place could never be filled again—many feel that, and find it turn out so—but a part of his being was gone: all that was soft, and kind, and tender in his nature died with Caroline Mannering. He never could get rid of a certain chivalry which was inherent in him, so sometimes he would do a generous thing; but he did it so harshly as to deprive the act of the semblance of good-nature. I think he very seldom again felt sympathy or compassion for any living creature. Perhaps he thought the world had behaved hardly to his dead love; and so never forgave it. She passed away very stilly and painlessly. She was leaning on his breast when he saw death come into her eyes; he shivered then all over, as if a cold wind had struck him suddenly, but spoke no word. She understood him though. Her last motion was to draw his cheek down to hers with her thin, shadowy arm; and her last breath went up to the God who would judge them both, in an unselfish prayer.

'She was rightly served,' says Cornelia; 'such women ought to be miserable.'

O rigid mother of the Gracchi! how we all respect you, *trônante* in the comfortable cathedra of virtue inexpugnable, perhaps unassailed! Your dictum must stand for the present. The Court is with you. But I believe other balances will weigh the strength of temptation, the weakness of human endurance, the sincerity of repentance, and the extent of suffered retribution, when the Father of all that have lived and erred since the world began shall make up His jewels. In that day, I think, the light of many orthodox virgins and dignified matrons will pale before the softer lustre of Magdalene the Saint.

Mohun remained in the Austrian service some time after Caroline Mannering's death, and, by dint of good service and interest, rose rapidly: but, about eight years before I saw him, a distant relation left him the estate in the west of Ireland, where he had resided ever since, making occasional visits to the Continent, and beating up his old quarters, but rarely coming to England.

He did not mix much with the county society, such as it was; and his visitors were chiefly friends from England who had not forgotten him yet, or the military quartered in his neighbourhood.

It was a dreary, desolate old house where he lived —massive, square, and grey. There were wooded banks and hollows just round it; but, farther afield, the chill, bare moorland stretched away towards the sea, broken here and there by sullen, sedgy tarns.

Here he spent his monotonous existence, riding hard and drinking obstinately, but never, even in the latter case, rising into conviviality. A long, bushy beard and portentous moustache, grizzled, though he was scarcely past middle age, which could not conceal a deep sabre scar, gave him a grim, sinister expression; and his voice had that brief imperious accent which is peculiar to men for many years used to give the word of command.

That worn, haggard face told a real tale. The furrows there had been ploughed by an enduring remorse, very different from that comfortable, half-complacent regret which some feel at the retrospect of their youthful *fredaines*.

They shake their solemn old heads as they hold themselves up to us as a warning; they sermonize with edifying gravity on the impropriety of such misdemeanors; but we can trace through all this an under-current of satisfaction tenderly fatuitous, as they go back to the days of their gipsyhood, when Plancus was consul.

I have been amused with watching these eminent but somewhat sensual Christians, on such occasions, and seeing the dull eyes begin to glisten, and the lips wrinkle themselves into a fat, unpleasant smile. *They* have prospered since, and certainly it would be most absurd to torment themselves now about the souls and bodies which they once sacrificed to a whim. Over those ruins and relics the River of Oblivion has rolled long ago—let them sleep on there, and take their rest!

Have we not the bright example of the prototype of this class—the pious Æneas? How creditable was his behaviour when he looked back over the black water on the trail of flame stretching from the funeral pyre where Dido lay burning!

'He knew,' says his admiring biographer, 'what the madness of women could do;' but the breeze was getting up astern, and favouring gods beckoned him on to Italy and fortune: so he sighed twice or thrice—perhaps he wept, for the amiable hero's tears were always ready on the shortest notice—and then, like the captain of the *Hesperus*, 'steered for the open sea.'

Did he feel a pang of remorse or shame at that meeting in the twilight of Hades, when he called vainly on Elissa, and the dead Queen, from where she stood by the side of Sychæus who had forgiven her all, turned on him the disgust and horror of her imperial eyes? Who can tell? The greatest and best of men have their moments of weakness. If so, be sure he was soon comforted as he reviewed the shadowy procession of his posterity of kings. The episode of Byrsa would scarcely trouble his conjugal happiness, or make him more indulgent to the mildest flirtation of Lavinia.

I fancy that poor Princess—after listening to a long, intensely proper discourse from her immaculate husband, or when the young Iulus had been unusually disagreeable—gazing wistfully in the direction where, against the sky-line, rose the clump of plane-trees, under which hot-headed, warm-hearted Turnus was resting after his brief life of storms. Then she would think of that unhappy mother who, with every impulse of a wilful nature, loved her child so dearly, till she would begin to doubt—it was very wrong of her—if Amata or the match-making gods were most right after all.

The neighbouring peasantry regarded Mohun with mingled dislike and terror—a feeling which was increased tenfold by an event which occurred about three years before my visit, in the height of the agrarian troubles. I cannot do better than give it, as near as I can, in the words of one who was an actor in the scene.

CHAPTER XVII.

Now what wouldst thou do, good my squire,
  That rides beside my rein,
Wert thou Glenallan's earl to-day,
  And I were Roland Cheyne?
* * * * * *
My horse should ride through their ranks sae rude,
  As he would through the moorland fern,
And ne'er let the gentle Norman bluid,
  Grow cauld for the Highland kerne.

It was in the beginning of December, 184— (said Fred Carew), we were just sitting down to dinner after a capital day's cock-shooting—besides myself there were Lord Clontarf, Mohun, and Kate, my wife—when we were disturbed by a perfect hail of knocks at the hall-door. Old Dan Tucker, or the Spectre Horseman, never clamoured more loudly for admittance. Fritz, Mohun's old Austrian servant, went down to see what was up; and, on opening the door, was instantly borne down by the tumultuous rush of Michael Kelly, gentleman, agent to half-a-dozen estates, and attorney-at-law. In the two last capacities he had given, it seems, great umbrage to the neighbouring peasantry, and they had caught him that night as he returned home, intending to put him to death with that ingenuity of torture for which the fine warm-hearted fellows are justly celebrated.

They did not wish to hurry over the entertainment, so confined him in an upper chamber, while they called their friends and neighbours to rejoice with them, carousing meantime jovially below. The victim contrived to let himself down from the window, and ran for his life to the nearest house, which, unluckily, happened to be the Lodge. Two boys, however, saw and recognized him as he entered the demesne, and raised a whoop, to show that they knew where the fox had gone to ground.

This we made out from a string of incoherent interjections; and then he lay, panting and contorting himself in an agony of fear.

Mohun sat on the hall-table, swinging his foot and regarding the spectacle with the indolent curiosity that one might exhibit towards the gambols of some ugly new importation of the Zoological Society. When the story was told, he pointed coolly to the door.

The shriek that the miserable creature set up on seeing that gesture, I shall never forget.

'Do you think I shall turn my house into a refuge for destitute attorneys?' Ralph said, answering my look of inquiry. 'If there were no other reason, I would not risk it, with your wife under my roof. A night attack in the West is no child's play!'

Kate had come out, and was leaning over the gallery: she heard the last words, and spoke, flushing scarlet with anger.

'If I thought that my presence prevented an act of common humanity, I would leave your house this instant, Colonel Mohun.'

Ralph smiled slightly, as he bent his head in courteous acknowledgment of her interruption.

'Don't be indignant, Mrs Carew. If you have a fancy for such an excitement, I shall be too happy to indulge you. It is settled, then? We back the attorney. Don't lie there, sir, looking so like a whipped hound. You hear? You are safe for the present.' He had hardly finished, when there came a rustling of feet outside, then hurried whispers, then a knock, and a summons.

'We'd like to spake wid the Curnel, av ye plase.'

'I am here; what do you want?' Mohun growled.

'We want the 'torney. We know he's widin.'

'Then I'm afraid you'll be disappointed. It's not my fancy to give him up. I wouldn't turn out a badger to you; let alone a man.'

You see, he took the high moral ground, now.

'Then we'll have him out, in spite of yez,' two or three voices cried out together.

'Try it!' Ralph said. 'Meantime I am going to dine; good-night.'

A voice that had not spoken yet was heard, with a shrill, gibing accent. 'Ah, thin, the best of appetites to ye, Curnel, darlin! and make haste over yer dinner. It's Pierce Delaney that'll give ye yer supper.' Then they went off.

'The said Delaney is a huge quarryman,' Ralph observed. 'He represents the physical element of terror hereabouts, as I believe I do the moral. We shall have warm work before morning. He does not like me. Fritz, send Connell up; he is below, somewhere.'

The keeper came, looking very much surprised. He had been in the stables, and had only just heard of the disturbance.

'Get the rifles and guns ready, with bullets and buck-shot,' his master said. 'We are to be attacked, it seems.'

The man's bold face fell, blankly.

'By the powers, yer honour, I haven't the value of an ounce of poudther in the house. I meant to get some the morrow mornin, afore ye were up.'

Mohun shrugged his shoulders, whistling softly.

'Man proposes,' he said. 'It's almost a pity that we found so many cocks in the Lower Copse this afternoon. I have fifteen charges or so in my pistol-case. We must make that do, loading the rifles light.' Then he went to a window, whence he could see down the road; the moon was shining brightly.

'I thought so; they have got scouts posted already. The barbarians know something of skirmishing, after all. Maddox, come here.' (The groom was a strong English boy, very much afraid of his master, but of nothing else on earth.) 'Saddle Sunbeam, and go out by the back gates, keeping well under the shadow of the trees. When you clear them, ride straight at the rails at the end of the paddock. You'll get over with a scramble, I think—keep fast hold of his head—you *musn't* fall. Then make the best of your way to A——, and tell Colonel Harding, with my compliments, that I shall be glad if he will send over a troop as quickly as possible. They ought to be here in two hours. And mind, don't spare the horse going, but bring him back easy. You will be of no use here, and I won't have him lamed if I can help it. You'll have to risk a bullet or two as you get into the road; but they can't shoot. It's odds against their hitting you. Now, go.'

The groom pulled his forelock, as if the most ordinary commission had been given him, and vanished.

'Connell,' Ralph went on, 'go and saw the ladders that are in the yard half through. They will hardly try the barred windows; but it looks more workman-like to take all precautions. Then come back, and help Fritz to pile chairs and furniture all up the staircase, and about the hall near it. Line the gallery with mattresses, two deep, leaving spaces to fire through. Light all the lamps, and get more candles to fix about; we shall not see very clearly after the smoke of the first dozen shots. When you have finished, come to me. Now, shall we go back to dinner?'

I am not ashamed to own I had little appetite; nevertheless, I sat down. Kate had gone to her room. If her courage was failing, she did not wish to show it.

Suddenly our host got up, and went to the window. His practised ear had caught the tread of the horse which Maddox was taking out as quietly as possible. We watched him stealing along under the trees, till their shelter failed him. Then he put Sunbeam to speed, and rode boldly at the rails. A yell went up from the road, and we saw dark figures running; then came a shot, just as the horse was rising at the fence. He hit it hard, and the splinters flew up, white in the moonlight; but he was over. We held our breath, while several flashes told of dropping shots after the fugitive. They did not stop him, though; and, to our great relief, we heard the wild rush of the frightened horse subside into a long stretching gallop, and the wind brought back a cheery hollo—'Forr'ard, forr'ard away!'

'So far, so good,' said Ralph Mohun, as he sat down again, and went in steadily at a woodcock. 'Don't hurry yourselves, gentlemen. We have three-quarters of an hour yet; they will take that time to muster. Clontarf, some hock!'

The boy to whom he spoke held out his glass with a pleasant smile. The coming peril had not altered a tint on his fresh, beardless cheeks—rosy and clear as a page's in one of Boucher's pictures.

A good contrast he made with the miserable attorney, who had followed us uninvited (it seemed he only felt safe in our presence), and who was crouching in a corner, his lank hair plastered round his livid convulsed face with the sweat of mortal fear.

It struck Mohun, I think. He laid his hand on Clontarf's shoulder, and spoke with a kindliness of voice and manner, most unusual to him—

'We'll quell the savage mountaineer,
  As their Tinchell cows the game:
They come, as fleet as forest deer;
  We'll drive them back, as tame.'

Even at that anxious moment, I could not help laughing at the idea of Ralph quoting poetry—of that grim Saul among the prophets.

I went in to keep up Kate's spirits. She bore up gallantly, poor child, and I left her tolerably calm. She believed in me, as a 'plunger,' to an enormous extent, and in Mohun still more. When I returned, my companions were in the gallery. This ran round two sides of the hall, which went up to the roof. The only access to the upper part of the house was by a stone staircase of a single flight. The kitchen and offices were on the ground floor, otherwise it was uninhabited.

Ralph had his pistols by him, and his cavalry sword, long and heavy but admirably poised, lay within his reach.

'I have settled it,' he said. 'You and Connell are to take the guns. Smooth bores are quickest loaded, and will do for this short distance. Clontarf, who is not quite so sure with the trigger, is to have the post of honour, and guard the staircase with his sabre. Throw another bucket of water over it, Connell—is it thoroughly drenched? And draw the windows up' (these did not reach to within ten feet of the floor), 'we shall be stifled else. But there will be a thorough-draught when the door's down, that's one comfort. One word with you, Carew.'

He drew me aside, and spoke almost in a whisper, while his face was very grave and stern.

'You will do me this justice, whatever happens. Unless it had been forced upon me, I would not have risked a hair of your wife's head to save all the attorneys that are patronized by the father of lies. But, mark me, if it comes to the worst, keep back a bullet for *her*. Don't leave her to the mercy of those savage devils. I know them. She had better die ten times over, than fall into their brutal hands. You must use your own discretion, though. I shall not be able to advise you then. Not a man of them will be in this gallery till I am past praying for. Nevertheless, I hope and believe all will be right. Don't trouble yourself to reload, Fritz will do that for you.

I have given him his orders. Aim very coolly, too; we must not waste a bullet. You can choose your own sword; there are several behind you. Ah, I hear them coming up. Now, men, to your posts.'

There was the tramp of many feet, and the surging of a crowd about and against the hall-door. Then a harsh, loud voice spoke—

'Onst for all, will ye give him up, or shall we take him, and serve the rest of yez as bad? Ye've got women there, too—'

I will not add the rest of the threat for very shame. I know it made me more wolfish than ever I thought it possible to feel; for I am a good-natured man in the main. Mohun, who is *not*, bit his moustache furiously and his voice shook a little, as he answered—

'Do you ever say a prayer, Pierce Delaney? You need one now. If you live to see to-morrow's sunset, I wish my right hand may wither at the wrist.'

A shrill howl pealed out from the assailants, and then the stout oak door cracked and quivered under the strokes of a heavy battering-beam; in a hundred seconds the hinges yielded, and it came clattering in; over it leaped three wild figures, bearing torches and pikes; but their chief, Delaney, was not one of them.

'The left-hand man is yours, Carew; Connell, take the middle one,' said Ralph, as coolly as if we had sprung a pack of grouse. While he spoke his pistol cracked, and the right-hand intruder dropped across the threshold without a cry or a stagger, shot right through the brain. The keeper and I were nearly as fortunate. Then there was a pause: then a rush from without, an irregular discharge of musketry, and the clear part of the hall was crowded with enemies.

I can't tell exactly what ensued. I know they retreated several times, for the barricade was impassable; and while their shots fell harmlessly on the mattresses, every one of ours told—nothing makes a man shoot straight like being short of powder—but they came on again, each time with added ferocity.

I heard Mohun mutter more than once, in a dissatisfied tone, 'why does not that scoundrel show himself?—I can't make out Delaney.' All at once I heard a stifled cry on my right, and, to my horror, I saw Clontarf dragged over the balustrade in the gripe of a giant, whom I guessed at once to be the man we had looked for so long. Under cover of the smoke, he had swung himself up by the balustrade of the staircase, and grasping the poor boy's collar as he looked out incautiously from his shelter, dropped back into the hall, carrying his victim with him.

With a roar of exultation the wild beasts closed round their prey. Before I had time to think what could be done, I heard, close at my ear, a blasphemy so awful that it made me start even at that critical moment: it was Ralph's voice, but I hardly knew it—

hoarse and guttural, and indistinct with passion. Without hesitating an instant, he swung himself over the balustrade and lighted on his feet in the midst of the crowd. They were half drunk with whisky, and maddened by the smell of blood; but—so great was the terror of Mohun's name—all recoiled when they saw him thus face to face, his sword bare and his eyes blazing. That momentary panic saved Clontarf. In a second, Ralph had thrown him under the arch of a deep doorway, and placed himself between the senseless body and its assailants. Two or three shots were fired at him without effect; it was difficult to take aim in such a tossing chaos; then one man, Delaney, sprung out at him with a clubbed musket. 'At last!' we heard Mohun say, laughing low and savagely in his beard, as he stepped one pace forward to meet his enemy. A blow that looked as if it might have felled Behemoth was warded dexterously by the sabre, and by a quick turn of the wrist, its edge laid the rapparee's face open in a bright scarlet gash, extending from eyebrow to chin.

His comrades rushed over his body, furious, though somewhat disheartened at seeing their champion come to grief; but they had to deal with a blade that had kept half-a-dozen Hungarian swordsmen at bay; and, with point or edge, it met them everywhere, magically. They were drawing back, when Delaney, recovering from the first effects of his fearful wound, crawled forward, gasping out curses that seemed floating on the torrent of his rushing blood, and tried to grasp Mohun by the knees and drag him down.

Pah ! it was a sight to haunt one's dreams.—(You might have filled my glass, some of you, when you saw it was empty.)

Ralph looked down on him, and laughed again ; his sabre whirled round once, and cleared a wide circle ; then, trampling down the wounded man by main force, he drove the point through his throat, and pinned him to the floor. I tell you I heard the steel plainly as it grated on the stone. There was an awful convulsion of all the limbs, and then the huge mass lay quite still.

Then came a lull for several moments. The Irish cowered back to the door, like penned sheep ; their ammunition was exhausted, and none dared to cross the hideous barrier that now was between them and the terrible cuirassier.

All this took about half the time to act that it does to tell. I was hesitating whether to descend or to stay where my duty clearly called me—near my wife. Fritz knelt behind me, silent and motionless : he had got his orders to stay by me to the last ; but the sturdy keeper rose to his feet,

'Faix,' he said, 'I'm but a poor hand at the swoording, but I must help the masther, anyhow ;' and he began to climb over the breastwork. The Colonel's quick glance caught the movement, and his brief imperious tones rang out over the hubbub of voices, loud and clear.

'Don't stir, Connell; stay where you are. I can finish with these hounds alone.'

As he spoke, he dashed in upon them with lowered head and uplifted sword.

I don't wonder that they all recoiled; his whole face and form were fearfully transfigured; every hair in his bushy beard was bristling with rage; and the incarnate devil of murder was gleaming redly in his eyes.

Just then there was a wild cry from without, answered by a shriek from my wife, who had been quite silent till now. At first I thought that some fellows had scaled the window; but I soon distinguished the accents of a great joy. My poor Kate? She had roughed it in barracks too long, not to know the rattle of the steel scabbards.

When the dragoons came up at a hard gallop, there was nothing left in the court-yard but the dead and dying. Mohun had followed the flyers to get a last stroke or two at the hindmost. We clambered down into the hall, and, just as we reached the door, we saw a miserable crippled being clinging round his knees, crying for quarter. Poor wretch! he might as well have asked it from a famished jungle-tiger. The arm that had fallen so often that night, and never in vain, came down once more; the piteous appeal ended in a death-yell, and, as we reached him, Mohun was wiping coolly his dripping sabre—it had no more work to do.

I could not help shuddering as I took his offered hand, and I saw Connell tremble for the first time, as he made the sign of the cross.

The dragoons were returning from the pursuit; they had only made two prisoners; the darkness and broken ground prevented their doing more. Ralph went up to the officer in command.

'How very good of you to come yourself, Harding, when I only asked you for a troop. Come in; you shall have some supper in half-an-hour, and Fritz will take care of your men. Throw all that carrion out,' he went on, as we entered the hall, strewn with corpses. 'We'll give them a truce to take up their dead.'

Clontarf came to meet us; he had only been stunned and bruised by the fall. His pale face flushed up, as he said, 'I shall never forget that I have to thank you for my life.'

'It's not worth mentioning,' Mohun replied, carelessly. 'I hope you are not much the worse for the tumble. Gad! it was a near thing, though. The quarryman's arms were a rough necklace.'

At that moment they were carrying by the disfigured remains of the dead colossus. His slayer stopped them, and bent over the hideous face with a grim satisfaction.

'My good friend, Delaney,' he muttered, 'you will own that I have kept my word. If ever we meet again, I think I shall know you. *Au revoir,*' and he passed on.

I need not go through the congratulatory scene, nor describe how Kate blushed as they complimented her on her nerve. Fortunately for her, she had seen nothing, though she had heard it all. Just as we were sitting down to supper, which Fritz prepared with his usual stolid coolness, and when Kate was about to leave us, for she needed rest, we remarked the attorney hovering about us, with an exultation on his face yet more servile and repulsive than its late abject terror.

'Mrs Carew,' said Mohun, 'if you have quite done with your *protégé*, I think we'll send him down-stairs. Give him something to eat, Fritz; not with the soldiers, though; and let some one take him home as soon as it's light. If you say one word, sir, I'll have you turned out *now*.

Mr Kelly crept out of the room, almost as frightened as he had been two hours before.

The supper was more cheerful than the dinner, though there was a certain constraint on the party, who were not all so seasoned as their host. *He* was in unusual spirits; so much so, that Clontarf confided to a cornet, his particular friend, that 'it was a pity the Colonel could not have such a bear fight once a fortnight, it put him into such a charming humour.'

We had nearly finished when, from the road outside, there came a prolonged ear-piercing wail, that made the window-panes tremble. I never heard any earthly sound at once so expressive of utter despair, and appealing to heaven or hell for vengeance.

We all started, and set down our glasses; but Mohun finished his slowly, savouring like a connoisseur the rich Burgundy.

'It is the wild Irish women, keening over their dead,' he remarked, with perfect unconcern. 'They'll have more to howl for before I have done with them. I shall go round with the police to-morrow, and pick up the stragglers. Your men are too good for such work, Harding. There are several too hard hit to go far; and my hand-writing is pretty legible.'

The stout soldier to whom he spoke bent his head in assent, but with rather a queer expression on his honest face.

'Gad!' he said, 'you do your work cleanly, Mohun.'

'It is the best way, and the shortest in the end,' was the reply; and so the matter dropped.

The dragoons left us before daybreak; their protection was not needed, we were as safe as in the Tower of London. The next morning, while I was sleeping heavily, Ralph was in the saddle, scouring the country, with what success the next assizes could tell.

I go there again this winter for the cock-shooting, but I don't much think Kate will accompany me.

Now, who says 'a rubber'? Don't all speak at once.

CHAPTER XVIII.

He has mounted her on a milk-white steed,
  Himself on a dappled grey;
And a bugelet-horn hung down by his side,
  As lightly they rode away.

It is hard to describe the terrible *prestige* which, after the event I have been speaking of, attached itself to Ralph Mohun. As for attempting a second attack on the fatal house, the peasantry would as soon have thought of storming the Bottomless Pit. They did not even try a shot at him from behind a wall; considering him perfectly invulnerable, they deemed it a pity to waste good powder and lead that might be usefully employed on an agent or process server. As his gaunt, erect figure went by, the men shrunk out of his path, and the women called their children in hastily, and shut their cabin-doors; the very beggars, who are tolerably unscrupulous, gave his gate a wide berth, crossing themselves, with a muttered prayer, 'God stand betwixt us and harm.' If Ralph perceived this, I think he rather liked it; at all events he made no attempt, either by softening his manner, or by any act of benevolence, to win the popular favour.

Before going to the Lodge I had heard from Livingstone. He said that his cousin's affair with Charley was progressing satisfactorily (I knew what that meant), and that he himself was going to sell out. I was not surprised at this; for some time past even the light restraint of service in the Household Brigade had begun to bore him. But the intelligence, conveyed in a brief note from him, during my stay with Mohun, startled me very much. It announced, without any preface or explanation, that he was engaged to Constance Brandon.

I had observed that lately he had never mentioned or alluded to Miss Bellasys; but he had been equally silent about his present betrothed. I told my host of the news directly.

'I am very glad to hear it,' he said. 'I never heard anything but good of his *fiancée*. She is wonderfully beautiful, too, I believe, and her blood is unexceptionable. And yet,' he went on musingly, 'I should hardly have fancied that she would quite suit Guy. I don't know any one who would exactly. By-the-by, was there not a strong flirtation with a Miss Bellasys?'

'Yes, so strong, that I should have been less surprised to have seen her name in this letter.'

'Then he has not got out of that scrape, yet,' Mohun observed. 'That girl comes of the wrong stock to give up anything she has fancied without a struggle. I knew her father, Dick Bellasys, well. He contrived to compress as much mischief into his five-and-thirty years, before De Lawnay shot him, as most strong men can manage in double the time. He was like the Visconti—never sparing man in his anger, or woman in his love.'

I felt that he was right. I did not fancy the idea of Flora's state of mind, when she heard that all her fascinations had failed, and that her rival had won the day.

'I think I must leave you sooner than I had intended,' I said; 'I should like to be in England to see how things are going on.'

'You are right,' answered Ralph, 'though I shall be sorry to lose you. You have some influence with Livingstone, I know, though he is so hard to guide and self-reliant that advice is almost useless. If I had to give you a *consigne,* it would be—Distrust. If Miss Bellasys seems to take things pleasantly, be still more wary. I never saw a peculiarly frank, winning smile on her father's face without there being ruin to some one in the background. After all, you can do but little, I suppose. *Che sara, sara.*' He said this drearily, and with something like a sigh.

I had some business which detained me in Dublin, and it was nearly a fortnight after I received Guy's letter before I reached London.

Early on the morning after my arrival, I went down to his lodgings in Piccadilly. I found him at breakfast; after the first greetings, before I could say one word about his own affairs, he began to speak eagerly.

'What a pity you should have come too late for the catastrophe, when you had seen all the preface. Five days ago Bella and Charley made their great *coup*, and were married in Paris.'

'And Bruce?' I said, recovering from the intelligence, which was not so unexpected, after all.

'Ah! Bruce,' Guy replied; 'I should be very glad if I knew what he *was* doing at this moment. I have been expecting him every day; but nothing has been heard of him since he left my mother's presence, in a rabid state of fury. Did I tell you it was from Kerton they fled? I thought he must have come to me for an explanation, knowing that I was an accessory before the fact. Indeed I lent Charley the sinews of war, in the shape of a blank cheque, which I see, this morning, he has filled up for a thousand—just like his modesty. Well, I hope they'll amuse themselves! Bruce has never been near me. Suicide is the most charitable suggestion I've heard yet; but coroners are silent, and the Thames, if it is conscious of that unlucky though disagreeable man, keeps his secret so far.'

Then he went on to give me more particulars of the *escapade*. It seems that Miss Raymond had gone out to walk alone, after luncheon, and that nothing more was heard of her till dinner-time, when a note was found on her dressing-table, addressed to her aunt, containing the intelligence of her flight with Forrester, and a little piece of ready-made penitence: the first, for all whom it might concern; the second, for her father.

That placid Lord Ullin received the news by telegraph, when he was well into his second rubber at the 'Travellers;' he put the message into his pocket without remark, and won the rubber before he rose. It has been reported that he was somewhat absent during its progress, so much so, as to rough his partner's strongest suit; but this I conceive to have been an after-thought of some one's, or a *canard* of the club. Impavid as the Horatian model-man—(just in all his *dealings*, and tenacious of the odd-trick)—I cannot imagine the convulsion of nature which would have made him jeopardize by any sin of omission or commission, the winning of the long odds.

He found Bruce that night, and told him all. He never would give any account of that interview; it must have been a curious one.

> *ξυνώμοσαν γὰρ, ὄντες ἔχθιστοι τὸ πρὶν,*
> *πῦρ καὶ θάλασσα——.*

Fancy the well-iced conventionalities of the one, brought in contact with the other's savage temperament, maddened by baffled desires and the sense of shameful defeat.

Before noon the next day, it was announced to Lady Catherine, at Kerton Manor, that Bruce was waiting for her in the drawing-room. It was with a diffidence and sense of guilt very strange to her pure, straightforward nature, that she obeyed the summons.

His back was to the door as she entered.

'I cannot tell you how sorry I am,' she began.

Bruce turned towards her his ghastly face, ravaged and deformed by passion and sleeplessness, like a cane-brake in the Western Indies over which a tornado has passed. He did not appear to notice her words or her offered hand; but spoke in a strange broken voice, after clearing his parched throat once or twice, huskily—

'When did they go? At what hour?'

She told him as well as she could.

'Where have they gone to?'

'I have not the least idea. Bella gave no hint of this. Would you like to see her note?' and she held it out to him.

The name appeared to sting him like the cut of a whip; for he started convulsively as he took the scrap of paper. He read it through more than once, as if unable to comprehend it; the power of discrimination seemed blasted in his dry, red eyeballs; they could only glare.

He made it out at last, and crumpled it up in his hand, clenching it till the knuckles became dead-white under the strain.

'We were to have been married this day month,' he said to himself, in a hoarse whisper; then raising his voice,—‘You can guess, at least, which route they have taken?’

‘Indeed I cannot,’ she answered; ‘I would have done anything to prevent this; but you must see that pursuit now would be worse than useless, it could only lead to fresh evils.’

Then the smouldering passion burst into a flame.

‘It is false!’ he cried out; you would have done nothing. It is a plot! You are all in it; you, your son, and more that I will know soon. I saw it from the first moment I set foot in this cursed house. And you think I will not be revenged? Wait, wait, and see!’ He spoke rapidly, but it seemed as if the words could hardly force their way through his gnashing teeth.

Good and kind-hearted as she was, there breathed no prouder woman than Lady Catherine Livingstone. Before he had ended, her hand was on the bell.

‘Not even your disappointment can excuse your language,’ she said in her clear, vibrating tones; ‘our interview is ended. I have pitied you hitherto, and blamed my niece; I do neither now—she knew you better than I. Not one word more. Mr Bruce’s carriage.

Bruce glared at her savagely; he would have sold his soul, I believe, to have strangled her where she stood; but Guy’s own peculiar look was in the cold, disdainful eyes, which met his without flinching or faltering. He knew that look very well, and quailed under it now, as he had done many times before.

'A last piece of advice,' Lady Catherine said, as he turned to go; 'you had better curb your temper, if you think of seeing my son. He may scarcely be so patient with you as I have been.'

If he heard it, he did not notice the remark; but left the room slowly. He lifted his hand but not his head, in a stealthy gesture of menace, as he reached the door.

Lady Catherine stood for some moments after his departure, as if in thought, unconsciously retaining her somewhat haughty attitude and expression. Then she went to her room, and prayed, with many tears, that Isabel Raymond might never have to repent the step she had taken so rashly. I think a presentiment of danger made her pray for Guy too. But did she ever forget him when she was on her knees?

Nevertheless, Bruce had not shown upon the scene since; so that they could not convey to him the intelligence, when Isabel Forrester wrote from Paris to communicate her marriage.

Guy went to Mr Raymond, as a plenipotentiary from the recently Allied Powers, to obtain, if possible, fair conditions of peace. His uncle was breakfasting alone, and received him with perfect good-temper.

'My dear boy,' he said, 'it was a match of your poor aunt's making, not mine. If she had lived to see it broken off, I think she would have been very much provoked.' (He gave a slight shudder of reminiscence here, and finished his chocolate.) 'But they say there is no marrying or giving in marriage where she is gone; so, let us hope, it will not seriously affect her now. As to me, I have never been angry since I was twenty-two. Personally, I very much prefer Forrester to Bruce as a connection. I should have allowed Bella £300 a year, and I suppose the necessary outfit and presents would have cost me about £500. I will do just the same now: neither more nor less. You can tell Charley, he may draw for the last sum and for the first quarter, when he pleases. They had better travel for a year or so, I think, till people have stopped talking about them. Charley will sell out, of course?'

'His papers are sent in,' Guy replied.

'Just so,' Raymond went on. 'If they are in a pleasant place, I may very likely go and see them this summer. Suggest Hombourg. I should like to try the waters. And tell Charley not to go about too much alone after nightfall. The deserted one is capable of laying a trap for him. I didn't like his look when I saw him last. That is all, I think. Do you go to Lady Featherstone's to-night?'

Raymond appeared at his clubs and elsewhere, with a face so impenetrably cheerful and complacent, that his bitterest friend dared not venture on a condolence.

CHAPTER XIX.

Tu mihi, tu certè (memini), Græcine, negabas,
Uno posse aliquem tempore amare duas.

When I had heard all this, I questioned Guy about his own affairs. He was not very communicative, though he seemed perfectly happy and hopeful as to the future. He said that his marriage was not to take place till the autumn, when Miss Brandon's brother (they were orphans) was expected to return from India. I could not help asking what Flora Bellasys thought of it?

Livingstone bit his lip, and frowned slightly, as he answered, 'Well! there *was* a scene, rather a tempestuous one, to speak the truth; but we are perfectly good friends now. I wonder if she ever really expected me to marry her? she is the most amusing person alive to flirt with; but as for serious measures'—he shrugged his shoulders expressively. 'Perhaps she *has* something to complain of; but if she has any conscience at all, she ought to recognize the *lex talionis.*'

I was not convinced or satisfied: but it was useless to pursue the subject then.

'Will you ride to-day?' Guy asked. 'There are always horses for you here. I should like to introduce you to Constance. We shall be in the Park about five.'

I accepted willingly, and left him soon afterwards.

A little after the hour he had named, I saw Livingstone's tall figure turn the corner by Kensington Gardens, riding on Miss Brandon's right: on her left was her uncle, Mr Vavasour, her usual escort.

She was rarely lovely, certainly, as I was sure she would be, for Guy's taste in feminine beauty was undisputed. Her features were delicate, but very clearly cut; the nose and chin purely Grecian in their outline; the dark grey eyes met you with an earnest true expression, as if they had nothing to conceal. Her broad Spanish hat suited her well, shading as it did cheeks slightly flushed by exercise, and shining tresses of that colour which with us is nameless, and which across the Channel they call—*blond cendré.* Her hand was strikingly perfect even in its gauntlet. It might have been modelled from that famous marble fragment of which the Banker Poet was so proud, and which Canova kissed so often.

There is a face that always reminds me of hers; though the figure in the portrait is far more matured and developed than Constance's willowy form—the picture of Queen Joanna of Naples, in the Palazzo Doria.

I have stood before it long, trying in vain to read the riddle of the haughty lineaments, and serene untroubled eyes. Gazing at these, who could guess the story of that most guilty woman and astute conspirator—unbridled in sensuality—remorseless in statecraft—who counted her lovers by legions, and saw, unmoved, her chief favourite torn limb from limb on the rack?

But this is no singular instance. Marble and canvass are more discreet than the mask of the best-trained living features. Messalina and Julia look cold and correct enough, since they have been turned into stone. Only by the magic of her smile, and by the glory of her golden hair, do we recognize Her who, if all tales are true, might have given a tongue to the walls of the Vatican. We forget the Borgia, with her laboratory of philtres and poisons—we only think that never a Duke of all his royal race brought home a lovelier bride than Alfonso of Ferrara.

Perhaps it is best so. Why should a mark be set upon those whom, it may be, history has condemned unrighteously? Let us not be more uncharitable than the painter or the sculptor; but pass on without pausing to reflect—*Desinit in piscem.*

If one had wanted to find a fault in Constance Brandon's beauty, I suppose it would have been that her forehead was too high, and her lips too thin and decided in their expression, especially when compressed under any strong feeling. But this defect it would have been hard to discover on this first occasion of our meeting. She looked so bright and joyous; and the light from her face seemed reflected on Guy's dark features, softening their stern outline, and making them radiant with a proud happiness. She received me very cordially, and I well remember the pleasant impression left on my ear by the first sound of her voice, soft and low as Cordelia's. In these two attributes it resembled that of Flora Bellasys; yet their tones were essentially different—as different as is to the taste a draught of pure sparkling water from one of strong sweet wine. We had taken two or three turns, when a large party approached us, in the centre of whom I recognised instantly Miss Bellasys. If possible, she looked handsomer than ever, as she swept by at a sharp canter, sitting square and firmly, but yielding just enough to the stride of the horse—perfectly erect, but inimitably lithe and graceful.

Nothing in her demeanour betrayed the faintest shade of emotion; but I remembered the old maxim of the fencing-school—'Watch your enemy's eyes, not his blade; and I caught Flora's, as she raised her head after returning our salutation, before she had time to discipline them thoroughly. I saw them glitter with defiant hatred as they lighted on her rival. I saw them melt with passionate eagerness, as for one brief moment they followed Guy's retreating figure and averted face. Half of Mohun's warning became superfluous after that. I was in no danger of being deceived by 'Miss Bellasys taking things pleasantly.'

Yet, as time wore on, the idea forced itself on me more and more, that Livingstone's choice was, in some respects, a mistake. They were *not* suited to each other. Constance was as unsuspicious and as free from common-place jealousies as the merest child; but some of her lover's proceedings did not please her, and she told him so—perhaps without attending sufficiently to the '*suaviter in modo*'—for, when it was a question of duty, real or fancied, to herself and to others, she was rigid as steel. Besides this, she was a strict observer of all Church canons and rituals; and more than once, when Guy had proposed some plan, a Vigil, or Matins, or Vespers came in the way. She did all for the best, I am certain, and judged herself far more severely than she did others; but she could not guess how anything like an admonition or a lecture grated on the proud, self-willed nature that from childhood had been unused to the slightest control. To speak the truth, too, she was not exempt from that failing which brought ruin on the brightest of the angels, and punishment eternal on the Son of the Morning; so that pride may often have checked the evidence of the deep love she really felt, and made her manner seem constrained and cold.

I only guess all this; for neither then, nor at any future time, did I ever hear from Guy the faintest whisper of accusation or complaint.

I do not think he contradicted her often; I am quite sure it never came to a quarrel, or even a dispute. They were not a couple likely to indulge in the *amantium iræ;* but sometimes after quitting her, his brow was so ominously overcast, that it would have gladdened the very heart of Flora Bellasys to have seen it. Once, I remember, after sitting some time in silence, his eyes turned towards a table, where, among other letters, lay a little triangular note unopened. He broke the seal, and read it through, frowning still heavily; after a few moments of what looked like hesitation, he seemed to come to a decision, and burnt it slowly at the flame of his spirit-lamp. Then he rose, and shook all his mighty limbs—as the Danite Titian might have done, before his locks were shorn—and sat down again with a long-drawn sigh, as of relief. I longed to interpose with a warning word, for in the handwriting I recognized the *griffe* of the fatal Delilah. But I knew how dangerous it was to attempt interference with Guy; and besides, this time, I felt sure he had escaped the toils. Yet my heart sank, as I thought of the seductions and temptations that the future might have in store. I could hardly keep my temper that evening, when I saw at the opera Flora Bellasys—triumphant, as if she could guess what the morning's work had been—and then thought of the single, guileless heart whose happiness she was plotting to overthrow.

She and Guy met constantly; for he still went everywhere, often unaccompanied by his *fiancée.* They seemed to be on the most ordinary footing of old acquaintances: though it was remarked that no one could be said to have succeeded to the post of Grand Vizier at the Bellasys Court, vacated by Livingstone. I cannot trace the threads of the web of Circe. She concealed them well, at the time; and since—between the knowledge of them, and me, is drawn the veil of a terrible remorse, which I have never tried to penetrate.

I can only tell the end, which came very speedily.

CHAPTER XX.

'Tis good to be merry and wise;
'Tis good to be honest and true;
'Tis good to be off with the old love,
Before you are on with the new.

There was a sound of revelry by night in Mrs Wallace's villa at Richmond, and fair women and brave men mustered there strong. Every one liked those parties. The hostess was young and very charming; while her husband, a bald, inoffensive, elderly man, was equally eminent in his own department of the commissariat. His wines were things to dream of in after years, when, like Curran, 'confined to the port' of a remote country inn, one sacrifices oneself heroically on the altar of the landlord, for the good of the house.

The crowd was not so dense as at most London parties, and the temperature consequently something below that of a vapour-bath or of the *Piombi;* but the generality of the guests were either amusing, or pretty, or otherwise eligible. To be sure it was rather an expedition and a question of passports, to get down there; but the drive home through the cool dewy morning made you amends.

Constance Brandon was present. I never saw her look so lovely as on this, her last appearance on the world's stage. No one could have guessed that, five hours later, the light was to die in her eyes, and the colour in her cheeks—never to return to either again, till she shall wake on the Resurrection morning.

Flora Bellasys was there, too, in all the insolence of beauty, defying criticism, and challenging the admiration that was lavished on her. I should like to describe her dress; but I know how dangerous it is for the uninitiate to venture within the verge of those awful mysteries over which, as Hierophants, Devy and Maradan-Carson preside. Conscious of my sex I retire. Have we not read of Actæon?

Still I may say that I have an impression of her being surrounded by a sort of cloud of pale blue *tulle*, over which bouquets of geranium were scattered here and there; and I remember perfectly a certain serpent of scarlet velvet and diamonds, flashing amidst the rolls and braids of her dark shining tresses.

The evening began with private theatricals, which were most successful. There was a *soubrette*—provoking enough to have set all the parti-coloured world by the ears—who traced her descent from a vavasor of Duke William the Norman; and an attorney's clerk, who had evidently mistaken his profession when he took a commission in the Coldstreams.

Soon after the ball which followed had begun, Livingstone arrived. He had been dining at the mess of his old regiment. I never remember seeing him, what is called, the worse for liquor. His head was marble under the influence of wine, and of yet stronger compounds ; but the instant I met his eyes, I guessed from their unusual brilliancy, and from the slight additional flush on his brown cheeks, that the wassail had been deep.

He paused for a moment to say a word or two to me ; and I noticed that the first person whom his glance lighted on was—not his betrothed, but Flora Bellasys. The latter was resting after her first polka with her usual staff of admirers round her, Guy watched the circle paying their homage, and I heard him mutter to himself the formula of the Roman arena—*Morituri te salutant*. Then he passed on ; and after retaining Constance for her first disengaged turn, he began talking to a lady, whom I have not noticed yet, but who merits to be sketched hastily.

Rose Thornton was not clever. She was no longer in her first youth, and had never been pretty or very attractive. Her figure was neat, and her face had a sort of nervous deprecating expression, that made you look at it a second time. Nevertheless, she was always deeply engaged, and generally to the best goers in the room. She was a good performer herself, but this would not account for it; ninety-nine girls out of every hundred are that, after two seasons' practice. Those who were in the secret did not wonder at her luck. She was the *âme damnée* of Flora Bellasys.

When the latter ventured on any unusually daring escapade, she was always really accompanied by Miss Thornton, or supposed to be so. How the influence was originally acquired, I know not; at the time I speak of she had no more volition left than a Russian grenadier. She had some principles of action once, I suppose, and considered herself as an accountable being; but all such vanities her 'dashing white serjeant' had drilled out of her long ago. Poor thing! It was no wonder that the frightened look had become habitual to her face, and that she always spoke with reserve and constraint, as if to guard against the chance betrayal of some terrible secret. It was no sinecure her office—alternately scapegoat and *confidante*. My own idea is, that having still a little feeble remnant of a conscience remaining, she suffered agonies of remorse at times, in the latter capacity. Dancing was her great—almost her only pleasure; and Flora, certainly, provided her regularly with partners. Indeed, some one had irreverently designated Miss Thornton as The Turnpike; inasmuch, as before securing a waltz with the beauty, it was necessary to pay toll in the shape of a duty-dance with her *protégée.* Rose's gratitude was boundless. She never wearied in rendering small services to her patroness. She would write her notes for her, as La Raffé did for Richelieu, and fetch and carry like the best of retrievers; venturing every now and then on a timid caress, which was permitted rather than accepted, with an imperial nonchalance. The only subject on which she ever expanded into eloquence was the fascinations of her friend. She spent all her weak breath in blowing that laudatory trumpet, as if she expected the defences of the best-guarded heart to fall prostrate before it, like the walls of Jericho. And yet, if all the truth were known, I think she had as much reason to complain as the dwarf in the story who swore fellowship-in-arms with the giant.

I was sorry to see Livingstone linger at her side; yet more sorry when, by an easy transition, he passed on to Flora's, and the circle around her, from old habit, made room for him to pass. He did not stay there long, though—only long enough to make future arrangements, I suppose—and then, for some time, I lost sight of him.

I had been driving heavily through a quadrille, in the society of a very foolish virgin, whose ideas of past, present, and future seemed bounded by the last opera, which she had, and I had not seen. A horror of great dulness had fallen upon me, and I went out to restore the tone of my depressed spirits by a libation, wherein I devoted, solemnly, my late partner to the infernal gods. When I returned they were playing 'The Olga,' and Flora was whirling round on Guy Livingstone's arm.

Amongst her many perilous fascinations, have I ever mentioned her wonderful waltzing? She was as untiring as an Almè; and when once fairly launched with a steerer who could do her justice, had a sway with her—to use an Americanism—like that of a clipper, three points off the wind.

As I watched her, almost reclining in her partner's powerful grasp, her lips moving incessantly though audibly only to him, as her head leant against his shoulder, I thought of the old Rhine-land traditions of the Wilis; then the daughter of Herodias came into my mind; and then that scarcely less murderous *danseuse*, at whose many-twinkling feet they say the second Napoleon cast his frail life down.

If in his assault on St Anthony, the Evil One mingled no Terpsichorean temptation, be sure it was because the ancient man had no ear for music. I do not think that weapon was forgotten when Don Roderic, who had once been a courtly king, did battle through a long winter's night with the phantasm of fair sinful La Cava.

The waltz was over; and I saw Guy and Flora disappear through the curtained door of the conservatory. If there was one thing Mrs Wallace was prouder of than another, it was the arrangement of this sanctum. Very justly so; for it had witnessed the commencement and happy termination of more flirtations than half the ball-rooms in London put together. When you got into one of those nooks, contrived in artful recesses, shaded by magnolias, camellias, and the broad thick-leaved tropical plants, lighted dimly by lamps of many-coloured glass, you felt the recitation of some chapter in 'the old tale so often told,' a necessity of the position, not a matter of choice. Against eyes you were tolerably safe, though not against ears; but this is of very secondary importance. The man who would not assist a woman in distress (as the stage sailor has it), by adhering to the whisper appropriate to the imparting of interesting information, deserves to be—overheard.

Flora sank down on a convenient *causeuse,* still panting slightly; not from breathlessness, but past excitement—the ground-swell after the storm.

'Ah, what a waltz!' she said, with a sigh. 'And what a pity it is so nearly the last! I shall never find any one else who will understand my step and pace so well.'

'Why should it be nearly the last?' Guy asked, contemplating the varying expression of her face and the somewhat careless *pose* of her magnificent figure, with more than admiration in his eyes.

'*On se range,*' Flora answered, demurely. 'And the first step in the right direction will be to give up one's favourite partners.'

He sat down by her, with a short laugh, that was rather forced.

'Bah! do you think because we are virtuous, there shall be no more cakes and ale?'

'Of course I do. I could sketch your future so easily. It will be intensely respectable. You will become a model country squire. You will hunt a good deal, but never *ride* any more. (You must sell the Axeine, you know.) You will go to magistrates' meetings regularly, and breed immense cattle; and you will grow very fat yourself. That's the worst of all. I don't like to fancy you, stout and unwieldy, like Athelstan.'

She ended pensively. The languor of reaction seemed stealing over her; but it only made her more charming, as she leant still farther back on the soft cushions, watching the point of her tiny foot tracing the pattern of the carpet.

'What a brilliant horoscope,' said Guy; 'and so benevolently sketched, too! Now your own, Improvisatrice?'

'I shall marry, too,' she answered, gravely. 'I ought to have done so long ago. Perhaps I shall make up my mind soon. Evil examples are so contagious.'

'And who will draw the great prize?'

'I have not the faintest idea. I suppose some fine old English gentleman, who has a great estate.'

'I only hope the said estate will be near Kerton,' Livingstone suggested; and he drew closer to his companion.

'Ah, dear old Kerton!' she said, sighing again. 'I shall never go there any more.'

'The reason?'

'Perhaps, because my husband, whoever he may be, will not choose to bring me.'

'Absurd!' Guy retorted, biting his lip hard. 'As if that individual would have any will of his own. You want to provoke me, I see.'

The answer came in so low a whisper, that, though he bent his ear down, he had almost to guess at the words.

'No; I have never tried to do that, even during the last three months. I am not brave enough. Perhaps I should not come, because—I could not bear it.'

They were silent. She was so near him now that her quick breath stirred his hair, and he could feel the pulse of her heart beating against his own side. The fiery Livingstone blood, heated seven-fold by wine and passion, was surging through his veins like molten iron. Memory and foresight were both swept away, like withered leaves, by the strength of the terrible temptation.

His arm stole round her waist, and he drew her towards him—close—closer yet; then she looked up in his face. The cloud of thoughtful gravity has passed away from hers, and the provocations of a myriad of coquettes and courtesans concentrated in her marvellous eyes.

He bent down his lofty head, and instantly their lips met, and were set together, fast.

A kiss! Tibullus, Secundus, Moore, and a thousand other poets and poetasters, have rhymed on the word for centuries, decking it with the choicest and quaintest conceits. But, remember!—it was with a kiss that the greatest of all criminals sealed the Unpardonable Sin—it was a kiss which brought on Francesca punishment so unutterably piteous, that He swooned at the sight who endured to look on all other horrors of Nine-circled Hell.

CHAPTER XXI.

God help thee, then!
I'll see thy face no more.
Like water spilt upon the plain,
Not to be gathered up again,
Is the old love I bore.

Before that long caress was ended, close behind them there broke forth a low plaintive cry, such as might be wrung from the bravest of delicate women, in her extremity of pain, when stricken by a heavy brutal hand.

The hot blood ebbed back in Guy Livingstone's veins, and froze at its fountain-head. His punishment had begun already. Before her face, white as the dress she wore, was revealed through a break in the dark-green foliage of the camellias, he knew that he had trifled away his life's happiness, and lost Constance Brandon.

She came forward slowly: with a valiant effort she had shaken off the first feeling of faintness that had crept over her, and there was scarcely a trace of emotion left on her features—calm and pale as the Angel of Death.

Guy had risen, and stood still, with his head bent down on his breast. For the first time in his life he was unable to raise his eyes—weighed down by the heavy sense of bitter disgrace and forfeited honour.

But the bright flush on Flora's cheek spoke more of exultation than of shame; the bouquet which she raised to her lips only half concealed a smile of triumph. She wreathed her slender neck haughtily, while she met her rival's glance without flinching. She thought that, if she had played for a heavy stake—no less than the jeopardy of her fair fame—this time, at least, the game was her own.

Constance spoke first, in a voice perfectly measured and composed. There was not a false note in the soft, musical tones. After once conquering her emotion, she would have dropped dead at Flora's feet sooner than betray how she was wounded.

'When you have taken Miss Bellasys back, will you come to me for a moment, Mr Livingstone? I will wait for you here.'

Flora rose before Guy could answer. 'Don't trouble yourself,' she said, gaily. 'Here is my partner for the polka looking anxiously for me. I am ready, Captain Ravenswood.'

She turned before reaching the door, to fire a last shot.

'It is the next galop I am to keep for you, is it not?'

This was to Guy; but there was no answer. He stood in precisely the same attitude, without a muscle of his face stirring, or an eyelash quivering.

In all the Rifle Brigade there was not a more reckless dare-devil than Harry Ravenswood, nor one who adhered more devoutly to the convenient creed—'All is fair in war or love.' But he saw that something had happened quite out of his line, and he did not venture on a single allusion to it, as he led his partner back to the dancing-room with a perplexed expression on his cheery face, which amused Flora intensely when she remarked it. When the subject came on for discussion afterwards, in the smoking-room at his club, he thus expressed himself in language terse and elegantly allegorical:—

'You see, Livingstone is a very heavy weight; a good deal better than most in the ring. When I saw him so floored as not to be able to come to time, I knew there had been some hard hitting going on thereabouts, so I kept clear.'

The two who were left alone in the conservatory remained silent for a few seconds. Then Guy roused himself and offered his arm to his companion, with an impulse of courtesy that was simply mechanical. She took it without remark; and they passed out through the door which led into the garden.

There Constance left his side; and, for the first time, their eyes met as they stood face to face under the bright moon. Guy read his sentence instantly—a sentence from which there was no appeal. The very hopelessness of his situation restored its elasticity to the somewhat sullen pride, which was the mainspring of his character. He stood waiting for her to speak; and his eyes were not cast down now, but riveted on her face—gloomily defiant.

'I hope you will believe,' Miss Brandon said, 'that it was quite involuntarily I became a spy on your actions. I did not overhear one word: and my partner had that moment left me, when I saw——.' Not all her self-command could check the shudder that ran through every limb, and the choking in her throat that would interrupt her.

'I have very little to add,' she went on, more steadily. 'After what I witnessed, I need hardly say that we only meet again as the merest strangers. You might think meanly of me, indeed, if I ever allowed your lips to touch my cheek or my hand again. Remember, I told you from the first we were not suited to each other; perhaps I deserve all I have met with for allowing myself to be overruled. You cannot contradict a word of this, or say that it is unjust or severe.'

Did she pause in the expectation, or the hope, of an excuse, or an appeal from her hearer? Only the hoarse answer came,—

'I have forfeited the right to defend myself, or to gainsay you.'

'You would find it difficult to do either,' Constance rejoined, rather more haughtily; perhaps she was disappointed in the tone of his reply. 'One word more;

if my name is ever called in question, I am sure no one will defend it more readily than yourself. My voice will never be heard against you; and if, hereafter, you should desire my forgiveness more than you now do, remember, I have given it unasked, and freely.'

Guy's tone was pregnant with cold, cruel irony, as he answered—

'I congratulate you on your position, Miss Brandon; it is quite unassailable. You are in the right now, as you always have been. You were right, of course, in always doling out the tokens of your love in such scanty measure as your pride and your priests would allow. They ought to canonize you—those holy men; I doubt if they have another disciple so superior to all human weaknesses. It must be very gratifying to so eminent a Christian to be able to forgive plenarily, without danger of the favour being returned. I have nothing to urge against your decision—that we part for ever. You will have no difficulty in forgetting me, whom you ought never to have stooped to. Yet I will give you one caution. I am not romantic, as you know, and I generally mean what I say. If you should think hereafter of bestowing yourself on some worthier object, hesitate a little, for *his* sake, or wait till I am dead; otherwise, the day that makes his happiness certain may bring him very near his grave.'

His voice had changed during the last words into a growl of savage menace; and his forehead was black and furrowed with passion.

It might have been his own excited fancy, or the passing just then of a light cloud over the moon; but, for an instant, he thought he saw her steady lip quiver and tremble. If so, be very sure it was not fear which caused the emotion, though even that the circumstance might have excused; rather, I think, it was a pang of self-reproach; a consciousness of having acted unwisely, though for the best; perhaps, too, the stubbornness of the heart she had ruled once—so strong and proud even in its abasement—was congenial to her own besetting sin; she liked the fierce threat better than the cool sarcasm. At any rate, she answered more gently than she had yet spoken.

'I believe you. But you know me better than to think a threat would influence me. Yet you need not fear my ever again trusting this world with my happiness. You will be very sorry hereafter for some things you have said to-night. Ask yourself—If I had loved you, as you seem to have expected, better than my own soul, would the result have been different? It is too late now to say anything but—farewell. Will you not say it, as I do, kindly, or at least not in anger—Guy?'

She paused between the last two words, and their imploring accent was almost piteous. There must have been a strange fascination about Livingstone, for, saint as she was, no other living creature would have won such a concession from the Christian charity of Constance Brandon.

Had Guy spoken then, as he ought to have done, I believe all might have been amended; but an angry devil was busy within him, and would not let go his prey; he stood with his black brows downcast, and with folded arms, never seeming to notice the slender fingers that sought to touch his hand. True it is, that nothing makes a man so unforgiving as the consciousness of having inflicted a bitter wrong. He heard a sigh, heavy and despairing as Francesca's when her dying prayer was spurned, a light shadow flitted across the streak of moon-lit grass, and, when he raised his head, he was left alone, like Alp on the sea-shore, to judge the battle between a remorseful conscience and a hardened heart.

Livingstone was seen no more that night; Constance glided in, alone, and her absence had been scarcely noticed. During the short time that she remained, no one could have guessed from her face that her heart was broken, any more than did Napoleon that the aid-de-camp who brought the news of Lannes' victory had been almost cut in two by a grape-shot.

I speak it diffidently, with the fear of the Divine Voice of the People before my eyes, as is but fitting in these equalizing days, when territories, the title to which is possession immemorial, are being plucked away acre by acre, and hereditary privileges mined one by one; but, it seems to me, in this, perhaps solitary attribute, 'the brave old Houses' still keep their pre-eminence.

They are not better, nor wiser in their generation (forbid it, Manchester), nor even more daring in confronting danger, than the thousands whose grandsires are creations of a powerful fancy or of a complaisant King-at-Arms. In that terrible charge which swept away the Russian cavalry at Eylau, three lengths in front of the best blood in France rode the innkeeper's son. The 'First Grenadier' himself was not more splendidly reckless, though he was a La Tour d'Auvergne. But in passive uncomplaining endurance, in the power of obliterating outward tokens of suffering, physical or mental, may we not still say—*Noblesse oblige?*

Hundreds of similar isolated instances may be quoted from the annals of the Third Estate; but, in the class I speak of, this quality seems a sixth sense wholly independent of, and often contradicting, the rest of the individual's disposition.

I remember meeting in France an old Italian refugee. He had not much principle, and very little pride; he was ready *quidvis facere aut pati* to get a five-franc piece, which he would incontinently stake and lose at baccarat or écarté, as he had done afore-time with a large ancestral inheritance; but his quiet fortitude, under privations that were neither few nor light, was worthy of Belisarius.

Very often, I am sure, his evening meal must have been eaten with the Barmecide; but his pale, handsome face, finished off so gracefully by the white pointed beard, still met you, courteous and unruffled, the ideal of an exiled Doge, or a Rohan in disgrace. Once only I saw him moved; when the landlord of our inn, a vast bloated *bourgeois*, smote the Count familiarly on the shoulder, and bantered him pleasantly on the brilliant prospects of his eldest son. It was not unkindly meant, perhaps; but the old man shrunk away from the large fat hand, as if it hurt him, and turned towards us a look piteously appealing, which was not lost on myself or Livingstone. When mine host, later in the evening, shook in his gouty slippers before an ebullition of Guy's wrath, excited by the most shadowy pretext, I wonder if he guessed at the remote cause of that out-pouring of the vials? Count Massa did, for he smiled intensely, as only an Italian can smile when amply revenged.

One instance more to close a long digression. I have read of a baron in the fifteenth century, who once in his life said a good thing. He was a coarse, brutal marauder, illiterate enough to have satisfied Earl Angus, and as unromantic as the Integral Calculus. He was mortally wounded in a skirmish; and when his men came back from the pursuit, he was bleeding to death, resting against a tree. When they lifted him up, they noticed his eyes fixed with a curious complacent expression on the red stream that surged and gurgled out of his wound; just as a *gourmand* looks at a bumper of a rare vintage held up to the light. They heard him growl to himself—'*Qu'il coule, rouge et fort, le bon vieux sang de Bourgogne.*' And then he fell back, dead.

O Publicola Thompson—Phōsphor to the Tower Hamlets and Boanerges of the platform—will you not allow that, amidst a wilderness of weeds, this one fair plant flourishes under 'the cold shade'?

CHAPTER XXII.

Shy she was, and I thought her cold;
  Thought her proud, and fled over the sea;
Filled I was with folly and spite,
  When Ellen Adair was dying for me.

When I came to Livingstone's chambers on the following morning, I found him alone. His head was resting listlessly against the back of the vast easy-chair in which he was reclining; and his face, thrown out in relief against the crimson velvet, looked haggard and drawn. The calumet—not of peace—was between his lips, and the dense blue clouds were wreathing round him like a Scotch mist. On a table near lay a heap of gold and notes. He had finished the night at his club, where lansquenet had been raging till long after sunrise. Fortune had been more kind than usual, and the fruits of 'passing' eight times lay before me. An open liqueur-case close at his elbow showed that play was not the only counter-excitement to which he had resorted.

I hoped to have found him in a repentant mood; but his first words undeceived me—'I start for Paris by this evening's train'—and then I remarked all about me the signs of immediate departure.

I had only a confused idea of what had happened, and was anxious to know the truth, but he was very brief in his answers: the particulars of what had passed I learnt long afterwards.

'Can nothing be done?' I asked, when he had finished all he chose to tell me?

'Nothing,' replied Livingstone, decisively. 'If excuse or explanation had been of any use, I think I should have tried them last night. You would not advise me to humiliate myself to no purpose, I suppose?'

There is a certain scene in Æschylus which came into my mind just then.

A group of elderly men, with grave, rather vacuous faces, and grizzled beards, stand in the court-yard of an ancient palace. On one side is the peristyle, with its square stunted pillars, looking as if the weight above crushed them, though it wearies them no more than the heavens do Atlas; on the other, a gateway, vast, low-browed, shadowy with Cyclopean stones. Somewhat apart is a strange weird figure, ever and anon starting up and tossing her arms wildly as she utters some new denunciation, and then cowering down again in a despairing weariness. There are traces, yet, in the thin, wan face, of the beauty which enslaved Loxian Apollo, and of the pride which turned his great love into a greater hate: round it hang the black elf-locks, dishevelled, that have never been braided since the gripe of Telamonian Ajax ruffled them so rudely. In her great troubled eyes, you read terrible memories, and a prescience of coming death — death, most grateful to the dishonoured princess, but before which the frail womanhood cannot but shudder and quail. No wonder that the reverend men glance at her uneasily; scarcely mustering courage enough sometimes to answer her with a pious platitude. Alas! alas, Cassandra!

While we gaze, forth from the recesses of the gynæceum there breaks a cry, expressing rather wrath and surprise than mere pain. Then there comes another, more plaintive,—the moan of a strong man in the death-throe.

We know that voice very well; we have heard it many times, calm and regal, above the wrangle of councils and the roar of battle; often it prayed for victory, or for the people's weal; but it never yet called on earth or heaven to help Agamemnon. The Chorus hear it too; but they linger and palter, while each gives his grave sentence deliberately in his proper turn. One or two advise action and interference, and stand perfectly still. At last, we hear a heavy choking groan, and a great stillness follows. We know that all is over—we know that there is a stir already down there in Hades—we seem to catch a far-off murmur raised by a thousand weak tremulous voices—the very ghost of a wail—as the shadows of those who died gallantly in their harness before Troy gather to meet their old leader—the mightiest Atride.

In the background of all, we fancy a hideous Eidolon, from whose side even the damned recoil in loathing. There is a grin on the lips yet red and wet with the traces of the unholy banquet. Thyestes exults over the fulfilment of another chapter in the inevitable Curse.

Who has not grown savage over that scene? We hate the old drivellers less, when, a few minutes later, they truckle and temporize with the awful Shape, who comes forth with a splash of blood on her slender wrist, and a speck or two on her white lofty forehead.

Just so helpless and useless I felt at that moment. I was standing by while a foul wrong was being wrought. I saw nothing but ruin for Guy, and desolate misery for Constance, in the black future. Yet I could think of no argument or counsel that would in the least avail. I felt sick at heart. It was some minutes before I answered his last question. At last the words broke from me almost unconsciously—'Ah! how will you answer to God and man for last night's work?'

I forgot that I was quoting the cry of the Covenanter's widow, when she knelt by her husband's corpse, and looked up into Claverhouse's face, with those sad eyes, that were ever dim and cloudy after the carbines flashed across them. But Guy remembered it, and answered instantly in the words of his favourite hero—

'I can answer it to man well enough; and I will take God in my own hand.'

Years afterwards, we both recalled that fatal defiance, when the speaker lay helpless, at the mercy of the Omnipotence whose might he challenged. Just then his servant, who was busily preparing for departure, entered the room.

Willis was a slight, under-sized man, of about fifty; his complexion was muddy and indefinite; his small whiskers, of a greyish red, were trimmed and pruned as accurately as a box border-edging, and the partial absence of eyebrows and eyelashes gave his face a sort of unfinished look. The expression natural to it was, I think, a low, vicious cunning; but his features and little green eyes were so rigidly disciplined that, as a rule, neither had any characteristic save utter vacuity. In his own line he was perfect. No commission that could be intrusted to him would draw from him a remark or a look of surprise. He executed precisely what he was told, and fulfilled the minutest duties of his station irreproachably, with a noiseless, feline activity. He was like the war-horse of the Douglas—

> —— Though somewhat old,
> Swift in his paces, cool, and bold.

He held a miniature-case in his hand as he entered, 'Am I to put this in, sir?' he asked in the slow, measured voice that was habitual to him.

His master gazed sharply at him, as if trying to detect a covert sneer—it would have been safer to have stroked a rattle-snake's crest than to have trifled with Livingstone just then—but Willis's face was as innocent of any expression as a dead wall.

'Put it down, and go on with your packing; you have no time to spare.' The man laid the case on a marble table near, and went out.

Guy took the miniature and regarded it steadfastly for some moments, then he looked up and caught my eye. Perhaps there was an eager appeal there (for I knew well whose likeness lay before him) which displeased and provoked his sullen temper; for he frowned darkly, and then his clenched hand fell with the crushing weight of a steam-hammer. Nothing but a heap of shivered wood, glass, and ivory remained of what had been the life-like image of Constance Brandon.

A thrill of horror shot through me, icily, and a low cry burst from my lips. I felt at that moment as if the blow had fallen not on the portrait, but on the original.

But I kept silence. The dark hour was on Saul, and I knew no spell to chase the evil spirit away.

Guy spoke at last. His manner was unusually chill and constrained.

'I expect to meet Mohun in Paris, and we shall probably go on to Vienna. I hardly like troubling you with commissions; but I must. Listen. I leave my own name—and another person's—in your keeping. I wish it to be clearly understood that the engagement was broken off by Miss Brandon—not by me. If you hear any man speak disparagingly of her, in connection with what has passed, you can insult him, on my behalf, as grossly as you please. I will be here, as fast as steam can bring me, to back what you may have said or done. This is the only point in which I hope you will guard my honour. As for blaming *me*—they may say what they please. Do you quite understand? And will you promise?'

I did promise; and so, after a few more last words, we parted, more coldly that we had ever done in all the years through which we had been intimate.

Guy left England the same evening, and descended like a thunder-clap on the joyous little *ménage* in the Rue de la Madeleine, where Forrester and his bride were still fluttering their wings in the honeymoon-shine of post-nuptial spring.

They were miraculously happy, those two. Indeed, they seemed to have only one taste between them, and that was Charley's. If he felt inclined, which was not seldom, to utter inaction, his wife encouraged him in his laziness—sitting contentedly for hours on her footstool, with her silky hair just within reach of his indolent hand. If, after dinner, he suggested the 'Italiens,' or the 'Bouffes,' it was always precisely that theatre that she had been thinking of all the morning. She was in the seventh heaven when he won a hurdle race in the Champ de Mars.

They made excursions into the *banlieue*, and further afield yet, like a couple of the *Pays Latin* in their first loves. The cabinets of Bercy and St Cloud knew them; so did the arbours of Asnières, where, in oilskin and *vareuse*, muster for their Sabbat the ancient mariners of the Seine. Nay, it has been whispered, that, more than once—close-veiled and clinging tightly to her husband's arm—Isabel witnessed at *Mabille* and the *Chaumière* the chorographic triumphs of *Frisette*, *Pomare*, and *Mogador*.

My hand trembles while I record such enormities and backslidings. O Brougham-girls of Belgravia, who 'never gave your mothers a moment's uneasiness,'—stars of the western hemisphere, who can be trusted anywhere, without fear of your wandering from your orbits—think on this lost Pleiad, once your companion, and be warned. Men are deceivers ever, even when they mean matrimony; and the tender mercies of the light dragoon are cruel.

Isabel was dreadfully startled at the sudden appearance of her cousin. Her notions of his power were quite unlimited and irrational; and, I believe, her first thought was, that he had changed his mind about the propriety of her marriage, and was come to carry her back into the house of her bondage with the strong hand.

When his curt sentences told her the facts, sorry as she was, it certainly was rather a relief to her. Charley was full of compassion, too, but he only confided this to his wife. He knew better than to try condolence with Guy, and felt instantly that the case was far beyond his simple powers of healing.

They did not see much of him. The contrast of their happiness with his own state must have grated on his feelings. His grim presence chilled and clouded their little banquets at the Trois Frères, or the Café de Paris. He sat there amongst the bright lamps and flowers, like a statue of dark marble that it is impossible to light up; drinking all the while, moodily, of the strongest wines to that portentous extent that it made Isabel nervous and her husband grave.

Perhaps Guy was conscious of the effect he produced; at all events he rather avoided the Forresters, finding in Mohun more congenial society. The latter probably regretted what had happened; perhaps he felt an approach to sympathy, after his rough fashion; but with this mingled a dreary sort of satisfaction at the sight of a strong mind and hardy nature rapidly descending to his own misanthropical level. Such an exultation was breathed in that ghastly chorus of the dead Kings and Chief Ones of the Earth, when they rose, each on his awful throne, and Hell from beneath was moved, at the advent of The Son of the Morning.

These two did not stay long in Paris, before they took their departure for Vienna.

We who were left behind in England talked a little at first, of course, about the broken engagement; but I had no occasion to throw down the gauntlet that had been left in my hands. I never heard anything more spiteful about Miss Brandon than that 'she was never suited to her *fiancé*—far too good for him.' Others 'had always thought how it would be; it would take a good deal more yet to tame Livingstone.' Sir Henry Fallowfield observed—'Nothing could be more natural and correct. The lady was a saint; and there is always a sort of incompleteness about saints, if they are not made martyrs. Suffering is their normal state.'

It was remarked that he was unusually cheerful for some days afterwards; and when Guy's conduct was canvassed, seemed inclined to quote the old schoolmaster's words, on witnessing his pupil's success—'Bless the boy! I taught him.'

Some other subject soon came up, and replaced the week's wonder.

Constance left town with her uncle almost immediately; and I heard nothing more of her for many months. Miss Bellasys remained. Very few persons even guessed at the share she had had in breaking off the match; so her credit was not much impaired, and her campaign was as brilliantly successful as usual. If she felt any disappointment at Guy's abrupt departure, she concealed it remarkably well. In some things, though naturally impetuous and impatient, she was as cool as a Red Indian, and would wait and watch for ever, if she saw a prospect of ultimate success. So the days rolled on, bringing swiftly and surely the bitter harvest-time, when he who had sown the wind was to reap the whirlwind.

CHAPTER XXIII.

And from his lips those words of insult fell—
His sword is good who can maintain them well.

It was the middle of October; the reflux of the winter season was beginning to fill Paris, and thither Mohun and Livingstone had returned from their German tour; the latter decidedly the worse for his wanderings. He had not suffered much physically; for the hard living that would have utterly broken up some constitutions had only been able to make his face rather thinner, to deepen the bistre tints under the eyes, and to give a more angular gauntness to his massive frame.

But morally he was not the same man. Play, which had formerly been only an occasional excitement, had now become a necessary part of his daily existence. Mohun would never say—perhaps he did not know—how much Guy had lost during those few months. In spite of several gigantic *coups* (he broke the bank both at Baden and Hombourg), the balance was fearfully on the wrong side; so much so, that it entailed a heavy mortgage—the maiden one in his time—on the fair lands of Kerton Manor.

I wonder people have not got tired of quoting—'*Heureux en jeu; malheureux en amour.*' It seems one of the least true of all stale, stupid proverbs. Luck will run itself out in more ways than one; and sometimes you will never hold a trump, however often the suit changes. The ancients knew better than we, when they called the double-sixes—'Venus's cast.' The monotony of Guy's reckless dissipations was soon broken by an event which ought to have sobered him.

He had been dining with Mohun at the Trois Frères, and they were returning late towards the Boulevards, when their attention was attracted by a group in one of the narrow streets leading out of the Rue Vivienne. Five or six raffish-looking men had surrounded a fair, delicate girl, and were preparing to besiege her in form; deriving apparently intense amusement from the piteous entreaties of their victim to be released. Not the *roués* of the Regency after the suppers that have become a by-word—not the *mousquetaires* after the wildest of their orgies—were ever so unrelenting in brutality towards women quite lonely and undefended, as those unshorn ornaments of Young France, when replete with a dinner at forty *sous*, and with the anomalous liquor that Macon blushes to own.

In all Europe there is no more genial companion and gallant gentleman than the aristocrat of France *pur sang*—in all the world no more terrible adversary than her wiry, well-trained soldier; but, from the prolific decay of old institutions and prejudices, a mushroom-growth has sprouted of child-atheists and precocious profligates, calculating debauchees while their cheeks are still innocent of down; who, after the effervescence of a foul, vicious youth has spent itself, simmer down into avaricious, dishonest *bourgeois* and bloated café-politicians. The teeth of the Republican Dragon have been drawn, but they are sown broadcast from Dan even to Beersheba. Ancient realm of Capet, Valois, and Bourbon—Motherland of Du Guesclin and Bayard—you may well be proud of your Cadmean offspring!

Guy was passing the scene with a careless side glance, when the accent of the suppliant caught his ear—not French, though she spoke the language perfectly.

'By G—d,' he said, dropping Mohun's arm, 'I believe it's an Englishwoman they are bullying;' and three of his long strides took him into the midst of the group.

Two of the aggressors reeled back right and left, from the shock of his mighty shoulders; and griping another, the tallest, by his collar, he whirled him some paces off on his back in the streaming kennel, as one might do with a very weak, light, little child. '*Au large canaille!*' he said, as he advanced on the two who still kept their feet. These drew back from his path without a second warning. One indeed, eminent in the *savate*, made a demonstration for an instant; but his comrade, who had just gathered himself up, caught his arm, muttering, *Ne t'y frotte pas, Alphonse. C'est trop dur.*' None of them fancied an encounter with the grim giant who confronted them --his muscles braced and salient—his eyes gleaming with the *gaudia certaminis,* and his nostrils dilated, as if they snuffed the battle.

So they made way for Guy and his charge to pass, only grinding out between their teeth the strange guttural blasphemies that characterize impotent Gallic wrath.

Mohun, a reserve scarcely less formidable, stood by all the while, looking on lazily; he saw that his companion was more than equal to the emergency.

'I hope you have not been much annoyed,' Livingstone said, kindly. 'Where were you going to? I shall be too happy to escort you, if you will allow me.'

She named the street, only a few hundred yards off, and tried to thank him gratefully; but her voice was broken and scarcely audible, and the blinding tears would rush into her eyes. Poor child! it was very long since she had heard gentle, courteous words in her mother tongue. She recovered herself, however, during their short walk, and they had nearly reached her destination when Livingstone said, 'Forgive me for being impertinent; I have no right to advise you; but I think you will find it better not to walk alone, often, at this hour. There is always a chance of something disagreeable.'

He could see her blush painfully, as she answered, 'I have no one to accompany me. I work hard at drawing and painting as long as there is light; and I had gone out to see if I could sell what I have done. But I fear I am a very poor artist; no one would offer me as much as they had cost me. And I tried at so many places!'

It was piteous to hear the heavy, heart-broken sigh.

'Perhaps I have better taste,' replied Livingstone. 'Those printsellers are absurdly ignorant of what is good and anonymous. At all events, they will interest me, as a memorial of to-night. Will you give them to me? I will promise not to be too critical.'

He drew the roll out of her hand, as she spoke, replacing it by his note-case; and before she could open it, or make any objection, he followed Mohun (for they had reached the artist's door by this time), first raising his hat to her, in adieu, as courteously as he would have done to a reigning archduchess.

How much did the case contain? Guy himself could hardly have told you. But, be sure, the Recorder of his many misdeeds knew, and reckoned it to the uttermost farthing, when he wrote down that one kind action on the credit side.

'Philanthropic, for a change!' Mohun remarked, when his companion joined him. 'Well! it's not worse than many of your vagaries. We shall have you founding an asylum next, I suppose?'

In his heart the savage old cynic approved; but, for the life of him, he could not check the sneer.

Livingstone made no reply. It was a habit of his, very often not to answer Ralph; and the latter did not mind it in the least. In a few moments they reached Guy's apartments, where they found about a dozen men—French and English—awaiting their arrival to begin an unbridled lansquenet. It was a favourite rendezvous for this purpose. The thoroughbred gamblers preferred it to the brilliant entertainments of the Quartier Bréda. They liked to court or fight Fortune by themselves, without being congratulated in success or compassionated in defeat by the fair Phrynes and Aspasias, whose sympathy was somewhat expensive; inasmuch as they always would borrow from the heap whenever any one won, repaying the loan in kind by smiles and caresses, which cost the happy recipient about fifteen Napoleons apiece. Here was an Eden from which Eves were excluded: and on the nights of the *Mercurialia*, the brightest Peri that ever wore camellias might have knocked at the gate disconsolately, but in vain.

While the tables were being prepared, Guy began to tell his late adventure. He spoke of it very lightly, but he thought if he passed it over altogether, Mohun would probably betray him.

Immediately there was a great cry for a sight of the performances of the unknown genius.

Livingstone looked over the drawings himself carefully, and then passed them to the man who sat nearest him. 'I have seen worse,' he said. 'There is no signature, and I shall not give you the address. You are none of you just the patrons she would fancy. You don't care much for high art.'

Amongst the guests was Horace Levinge, a pale, dark man, with a face that was decidedly handsome, in spite of its Jewish contour, and the excessive fulness of the scarlet, sensual lips. His grandfather, report said, had been a prize-fighting Israelite, and afterwards a celebrated betting-man—equally eminent in either Ring for an unscrupulous scoundrelism which made his fortune. His father had added to the family treasure and importance by cautious usury and adventurous stock-jobbing. Horace himself was a gentleman at large, with no other profession than the consistent pursuit of all kinds of debauchery. He was calculating even in his pleasures; and, they say, kept a regular ledger and day-book of the moneys disbursed in his vices.

When the drawings came to him, he glanced at them for a moment, and then threw them down with a little contemptuous laugh.

'I am sorry to spoil your romance, Livingstone; but I have a pretty good right to recognize the artist's touch. You know her, some of you: it is Fanny Challoner?'

'What, the girl you sent away about three weeks ago?' some one asked. 'Poor thing! she was not sorry, I should think. She had a hard time of it before she left you.'

'Precisely,' Levinge replied. 'Her modesty and high moral principles, which I never could quite subdue, gave a zest to the thing at first. You understand;—a sort of caviare flavour. But at last it bored me horribly. I really believe she had a conscience. Can you conceive anything so out of place? I did offer her a little money when she went away; but she would not take any, and said she would try to maintain herself honestly. Bah! I defy her. She was a governess, you know, when I took her first; so she is trying some of the old accomplishments. I wish you joy of your *protégée*, Livingstone; and as for her address, if any of you want it, I will give it you to-morrow.'

Before Guy could reply, Mohun broke in. While Levinge had been speaking, the colonel's face had grown very dark and threatening.

'Did her father live near Walmer? And was he a half-pay officer?'

'Quite correct,' was the answer. 'He died about eighteen months before I met Fanny. You knew him, perhaps? How interesting! Excuse my emotion.'

'I did know him,' Ralph said. 'He was a gentleman, and well born. Perhaps that was the reason you could not get on long with his daughter?'

It is a popular error, that a bully is always a coward. Certainly Horace was an exception to the rule, if such exists. Nothing could be more calmly insolent than his tone, as he answered deliberately—

'How admirable to find Colonel Mohun in the character of the Censor! A Clodius come to judgment. I should hardly have expected it, from his past life, either.'

The reply came from the depths of Ralph's chest, very distinct, but with a strange effect of distance and echo, as if the words had been spoken under the vault of some vast dome.

'You will leave my past life alone, if you are wise. I don't preach against immorality; it is only brutality that I find simply disgusting.'

'Bah!' the other retorted. 'It comes to the same thing. I should have thought Lady Caroline Mannering might have taught you to be less critical.'

The cuirassier rose from his seat, and strode a pace forwards, the grey hair bristling round his savage face, like a wild boar's at bay.

'If you dare to breathe that name again, except with respect and honour—I'll cram the words down your throat, by the Eternal God!'

Levinge crimsoned with passion. The brutal blood of the dead prize-fighter, who, when he 'crossed' a fight, lost it ever by a foul blow, was boiling in his descendant. He had been drinking, too, and, as the French say—*avait le vin mauvais*—so he answered coldly and slowly, letting the syllables fall one by one like drops of hail—

'I shall mention it just as often as it pleases me; and with just so much respect as is due to Mannering's cast-off wife and your—'

The foul word that was on his lips never left them, for Mohun's threat was literally fulfilled. His right hand shot out from the shoulder, with a sudden impulse that seemed rather mechanical than an action of the will, and catching the speaker full in the mouth, laid him on the carpet, senseless, and streaming with blood.

CHAPTER XXIV.

Look doun, look doun now, layde fair,
On him ye lo'ed sae weel :
A brawer man than yon blue corse
Never drew sword of steel.

THE dead silence that ensued was broken first by Guy Livingstone. 'It was well done! I say it, and maintain it; Mohun, I envy you that blow!' He looked round, as if to challenge contradiction; but evidently the general opinion was, that Levinge had only got his deserts. By this time the fallen man had recovered his consciousness, and struggled up, first into a sitting posture, then to his feet; he stood leaning against a table, swaying to and fro, and staring about him with wild eyes half-glazed. At last he spoke in a thick, faint voice, stanching all the while the gushing blood with his handkerchief.

'Will any one here be my second? or must I look for a friend elsewhere?'

There was a pause; and then from the circle stepped forth Camille De Rosny. He did not like Levinge, and thought in the present instance he had behaved infamously, but it was the fashion hereditary in his gallant house to back the losing side; so, when he saw every one else shrink from the appeal, he bowed gravely and said—

'I shall have that honour, if you will permit me. In an hour I shall be at the orders of M. le Colonel's second. Where shall I find him?'

'Here,' replied Livingstone. 'I think no one will contest my right to see my old friend through this quarrel.'

Mohun grasped his hand. 'I would have chosen you among a thousand. You understand me, and know what I wish.'

'Then I shall expect you, De Rosny?' Guy went on: the Frenchman assented courteously, and then, turning to his principal—

'Let us go,' he said. 'My *coupé* is at your disposition, M. Levinge. *Messieurs, au plaisir.*'

Horace followed him with a step that was still faltering and uncertain; but, at the door he turned, and straightening himself up, faced his adversary with such a look as few human countenances have ever worn. There was more in it than mortal hatred; it expressed a sort of devilish satisfaction and anticipation, as if he knew that his revenge was secured.

Mohun read all this as plainly as if it had been written down in so many words; but he only smiled, as he seated himself, and lighted a cigar.

There was an end of lansquenet for that night. An ordinary quarrel would have made little impression on those reckless spirits, who had, most of them, at one time or another, 'been out' themselves; but they felt that what they had witnessed now was the prologue to a certain tragedy; there was a savour of death in the air; so they dropped off, one by one, leaving Guy and Ralph alone; not before the latter had expressed, with much politeness, his 'desolation at having been compelled to interrupt a *partie*, which he trusted was only deferred till the morrow.'

Before long De Rosny returned. The preliminaries were soon arranged. Pistols were necessarily to be the weapons, for Levinge had seldom touched a foil; and, as the Frenchman said with a bow that made his objection a compliment, 'Colonel Mohun's reputation as a swordsman was European.' An early hour next morning was fixed for the *venue*, in the Pré aux Clercs of the nineteenth century—the Bois de Boulogne.

When they were alone again, Guy turned gravely to his companion. 'It is a bad business, I fear, though you could not have acted otherwise; but I would rather your adversary were any one than Levinge. It is a murderous, unscrupulous scoundrel as ever lived. He can shoot—that's nothing, so can you, better than most men—but, mark me, Ralph, he has been out twice, and hit his man each time, the last mortally; but on neither occasion was *his fire returned*. Men say he has an awkward knack of pulling the trigger half a second too soon. I don't know if this is true; but I do know that Seymour, who seconded him at Florence when he killed O'Neill, has been more than cool to him ever since.'

'Faith, I can well believe it,' Mohun answered, quietly, 'and it is very probable I may get hard hit to-morrow; but of killing him I feel morally certain. Do you believe in presentiments? I do. Before that drunken brute had half done speaking, I saw imminent death written in his face, as plainly as if I had possessed the Highland second-sight. I think I could almost tell you how it will look *after my shot.* Well, we must talk of business. My arrangements won't take me long. I have very little to dispose of, it is almost all entailed property. I shall leave you the choice of anything among my goods and chattels. You will find some arms that you may fancy. But if my pistols fail me to-morrow, so that Levinge lives over it, do me the favour to throw them into the Seine; they deserve nothing better. As for the ready-money I have with me, and some more at my bankers—' he hesitated, and then went on in a gentler voice, 'I should like it to go to that poor child whom we met to-night. If I live I will take care she is settled in England, where some one will be kind to her. Her father was a good soldier, and a true-hearted gentleman. And, Guy, I am sorry that I sneered at you to-night; I hardly meant it, when I said it.'

This was a great concession from Mohun, and his hearer thought so, as he wrung his hand hard, and replied,

'Don't think of that again. I did you justice an hour ago.'

There was this peculiarity about Ralph; he was not only insensible to danger, like other men, but he absolutely seemed to revel in it. The genial side of his character came out at the approach of deadly peril, just as some morose natures will soften and brighten temporarily under the influence of strong wine.

His mood seemed to change, however, suddenly; and when, after a long pause, he spoke again, it was in a low, broken voice, as if to himself.

'"Be sure your sin will find you out." It is thirty years since I heard that text; I forgot it the same day, and never thought of it again till now. There may be truth in that. It hunted *her* to her grave, and it will not leave her in peace, even there. And yet she suffered enough to make atonement. She tried not to let me see how much, but I did see it; I watched her dying for a year and more. I am sure she is an angel now. I like to think so, though I shall never see her again. I would not believe otherwise if a thousand priests said it and swore it; for I never moved from her side, after she was dead, till I saw the smile come on her face. She must have been happy then; do you not think so? They would hardly have gone on, punishing her for ever. It was all my fault, you know.'

He gazed at Livingstone anxiously, almost timidly. Guy bowed his head in assent, but he could not find words to answer just then. There was something very terrible in that opening of the flood-gates, when a life's pent-up remorse broke forth.

'I think you will end better than I have done,' Mohun went on; 'though you are going down-hill fast now. But I have no right even to warn you. Only, take care—.' He broke off suddenly, and roused himself with an effort. 'I shall go home and dress now, and get through what little I have to write, and then lie down for an hour or two. Nothing makes the hand shake like a sleepless night. I'll call for you in good time.' So he went away.

Livingstone sat thinking, without ever closing his eyes, till Mohun returned. The latter looked fresh and alert; he had slept for the time he had allotted to himself quite calmly and comfortably—the old habits of picquet-duty had taught him to watch or sleep at pleasure.

After Guy had made a careful toilette, at the special request of his principal, they started, and in forty minutes were on the ground. Levinge and his second, with the surgeon, arrived almost immediately;

the former stood somewhat apart, keeping the lower part of his face carefully muffled.

It was a dull, chill morning; the sky of a steely-grey, without a promise of a gleam from the sun, which had risen *somewhere*, but was reserving himself for better times. There was a desultory sort of wind blowing, just strong enough at intervals to bring the moist brown leaves sullenly down.

After the pistols had been scientifically loaded, the seconds placed their men fifteen yards apart—with such known shots it was not worth while shortening the distance.

The sensations of ordinary mortals under such circumstances are somewhat curious. Very few are afraid, I think; but one has an impression that one's own proportions are becoming sensibly developed—'swelling wisibly,' in fact, like the lady at the Pickwickian tea-fight—while those of our adversary diminish in a like ratio, so that he does not appear near so fair a mark as he did a few minutes ago. But, with all this, there is a quickening of the pulse not unpleasurable—something like the excitement of the 'four to the seven' chance at hazard, when you are backing the In for a large stake.

I do not believe Mohun felt anything of this sort. It was not his own life, but his adversary's death he was playing for; the other was busy, too, with still darker thoughts and purposes.

'Listen,' Guy said in French; 'M. de Rosny gives the signal, *un, deux, trois;* if either fires before the last is fully pronounced, it is murder.' He looked sharply at Levinge; but the latter seemed studiously to avoid meeting his eye. Guy felt very uncomfortable and very savage.

The men stood opposite to one another, like black marble statues, neither showing a speck of colour which might serve as a *point de mire,* each turning only a side-front to his opponent.

De Rosny pronounced the two first words of the signal in a clear, deliberate voice; the last left his lips almost in a shriek, for, before it was half syllabled, his principal fired.

Quick as the movement was, it was anticipated; as Levinge's hand stirred, Mohun made a half-face to the right, and looked his enemy straight between the eyes. That sudden change of position, or the consciousness of detection, probably unsettled the practised aim, for the ball, that would have drilled Ralph through the heart, only scored a deep furrow in his side.

No one could have guessed that he was touched; he brought his pistol to the level just as coolly as he would have done in the shooting-gallery, and, after the discharge, dropped his hand with measured deliberation. Before the smoke had curled a yard upwards, Horace Levinge sprang into the air, and, with outstretched arms, fell crashing down upon the grass —a bullet through his brain.

They turned him over on his back. It was a ghastly sight; the ball had penetrated just below the arch of the right eyebrow, and all the lower features were swollen and distorted with the blow of last night, adding to the hideous disfigurement.

Is that the face on which the dead man used to spend hours, tending it, like an ancient coquette, with washes and cosmetics, dreading the faintest freckle or sunburn which might mar the smoothness of the delicate skin? No need of the surgeon there. Cover it up quickly—the mother that bore him, if she could recognize it, would recoil in disgust and loathing.

'*C'en est fini,*' Livingstone said to De Rosny, who stood by shuddering in horror, not at the death, but at the treachery which had preceded it.

None but a Frenchman could have given such an accent to the low hissing reply—'*je l'espère.*'

Then they looked to Mohun's wound; it was nothing serious—there were a dozen deeper on the war-worn body and limbs. Indeed, I imagine his general health was materially benefited by the blood-letting. The first remark he made was, when he was depositing his pistol in its case—tenderly as you would lay a child in its cradle—'Do you believe in presentiments *now*, Guy?'

The sullen sun broke out just as they turned to go, and peered curiously through the boughs till it found out and lighted on the angular ominous heap, shrouded with a cloak, that, ten minutes ago, was a strong, hot-blooded man.

There the *garde* soon after discovered Horace Levinge ; and, when he had been owned, they buried him in *Père la Chaise.* Such events were common then, and the police gave themselves no trouble to trace who had slain the stranger. Amongst his tribesmen and kinsfolk in Hounsditch and the Minories there was great joy at first, and afterwards bitter, endless litigation. They screamed and battled over the heritage like vultures over a mighty carrion—tearing it at length piecemeal. He did not keep a pet dog, and so no living creature regretted him, unless it were the thin delicate girl, with white cheeks and hollow eyes, who came once and knelt to pray by his grave for hours, her tears falling fast.

Hard as they may find it to observe other precepts of the Great Master, this one, at least, most women have practised easily and naturally for eighteen hundred years—'Forgive, until seventy times seven.' The acts of some of these—how they warred with their husbands and were worsted ; how they provoked the presiding Draco, and stultified the atttesting policeman, by obstinately ignoring their injuries written legibly in red, and black, and blue ; how they interceded with many sobs for the aggressor—are they not written in the book of the chronicles of Bow Street and Clerkenwell?

This propensity leads them into scrapes, it is true, for our world in its wisdom will take advantage of such weakness. Perhaps the next will make them some amends.

But the mourner strewed no flowers on the grave. It would have been too bitter a mockery; for, if there were sympathy in sweet roses and pure white lilies, on no other spot of God's earth would they have withered so soon; she hung up no wreath of *immortelles;* for, if such things could be, the dearest wish one could have formed for the dead man's soul would have been swift, utter annihilation.

Yet Fanny Challoner would scarcely have accepted Mohun's good offices, if she had guessed that the blood of her seducer and tyrant was on his hand. She never suspected it, and so went gratefully to the home he found for her; and there she lives yet, tranquil and contented, though always sad and humble, among people who know nothing of her history and love her dearly, trying her best to be useful in her generation —alone in her cottage that nestles under a sunny cliff, just above the white spray-line of the Irish Sea.

CHAPTER XXV.

> Let me see her once again,
> Let her bring her proud dark eyes,
> And her petulant quick replies;
> Let her wave her slender hand
> With its gesture of command,
> And throw back her raven hair
> With the old imperial air;
> Let her be as she was then—
> The loveliest lady in all the land
> Iseult of Ireland.

MOHUN and Livingstone soon fell back into the groove of their old habits; if anything, the former was more forbidding and morose; the latter, more reckless than ever.

Just at this time, Mrs Bellasys and her daughter arrived in Paris. It was Flora's *début* there, and she had an immense success. The *jeunesse dorée* of the Chaussée d'Antin, and the cavaliers of the Faubourg, thronged about her, emulously enthusiastic. Her repartees and sarcasms were quoted like Talleyrand's. They never wearied in raving over her perfections, taking them in a regular catalogue—from her magnificent eyes and hair that flashed back the light from its smooth bands, like clouded steel, down to the small *brodequins* of white satin, which it was her fancy to wear instead of the ball-room *chaussure* of ordinary mortals. The intrigues to secure her for a waltz or a mazurka displayed diplomatic talent enough to have set half-a-dozen German principalities and powers by the ears. The succession of admirers was never broken; as fast as one dropped off, killed by her coldness or caprice, another stepped into his place. It reminded one of the old 'Die-hards' at Waterloo, filling up their squares torn and ravaged by the pelting grape-shot.

Here, as elsewhere, she pursued her favourite amusement, remorselessly. Fallowfield called it 'her cutting-out expeditions.' She used to watch, till a mother and daughter had, between them, secured a good matrimonial prize, and then employ her fascinations on the captured one—seldom without effect—so as to steal him out of their hands.

Do you remember Waterton's story of the osprey? The hard-working bird, by dint of perseverance, has brought up a good fish. Just as it emerges from the water, there is heard a flap and a whistle of mighty pinions; and, from his watch-tower on the cliff far above, swoops down the great sea-eagle. The poor osprey *a beau crier*, it must drop its booty; and the strong marauder sails off with a slow and dignified flight, to discuss it in the wood at his leisure. The only fault in the parallel was, that Flora always dropped the prey, with the coolest disdain, when it was once fairly within her clutches. How the match-makers did hate her! What vows for her discomfiture must have been breathed into bouquets, held up to conceal the angry flush of disappointment, or the paleness of despair!

I own this practice of hers did not raise her in my opinion. I cannot think so hardly as it is the fashion to do, of the junior and working members, at least, of the manœuvring Guild. It is not an elevating or very creditable profession, certainly; but it seems such a disagreeable one, that none would take it up from choice. The chief fault, at all events, lies with the trainers; the jockeys (poor little things!) only ride to orders; and, by-the-way, I think they generally err in not knowing how to *wait,* and in making the running too strong at first.

As I meet, year after year, one of these—to whom the seed sown in London ball-rooms and German watering-places had produced nothing yet but those tiresome garlands of the vestal—I look curiously to see how she wears, thinking of the courtier's answer to Louis XIV., when the latter asked if he was looking older—'Sire, I see some more victories written on your forehead.' It is more defeats that one can read so plainly on poor Fanny Singleton's.

How many shipwrecks close to port; how many races lost by a head; how many games, by a point, she must have known, before her silver laugh became so hollow, and her pleasant smile so evidently theatrical and lip-deep; before what once was chanceful became desperate, and she fell back into the ranks of the forlorn hope—of the 'Lost Children!'

On one of these occasions I met her. She was just beginning her *condottiere* life then, and was very attractive even to those on whom she had no designs—believed in balls, and had an ingenious talent for original composition. I don't think those entertainments are dangerously exciting to her now; and Heaven forefend that she should write poetry! One shudders to think of what it would be. Well—she was returning to the house after a moonlight flirtation (if you can call it so, when it was all on one side). She had been trying to fascinate a stupid, sullen, commercial Orson—a boy not clever, but cunning, who calculated on his share in the Bank as a means of procuring him these amusements, as other men might reckon on their good looks or soft tongue. He had just left her, and I was wishing her good night under the porch; she forgot her cue for a moment and became natural.—'I feel so very, very tired,' she said. I remember how drearily she said it, and how the tears glittered in her weary eyes. I remember, too, how, ten minutes later, I heard that amiable youth boasting of what had happened, and giving a hideous travestie of her attempts to captivate him; till at last my wrath was kindled, and, to his great confusion (for he was of a timid disposition), I spoke, and sharply, with my tongue.

Ah, me! I mind the time when men used to waylay Fanny Singleton in the cloak-room, and shoot her flying as she went up the staircase, in their anxiety to secure her for a partner; and now—she is a refuge for the destitute, except when some one, for old acquaintance sake, takes a turn with one of the best waltzers in Europe.

I like her for one thing—she has never tried the girlish dodge on yet. She has never been heard to say 'Mamma always calls me a wild thing.' It is better that she should be bitter and sardonic, as she is sometimes, than that. Mars herself could hardly play the *ingénues*, when in mature age. Grisi's best part now is not Amina.

The last thing I heard of Fanny was, that she was about to unite herself (the *active* voice is the proper one) to a very Low Church clergyman, a distinguished member of the Evangelical Alliance, pregnant with the odour of sanctity—*bouquet de Baptiste* treble distilled. I dare say they will get on well enough. If the holy man wants to collect 'experiences,' his wife will be able to furnish them,—that's certain. It will be very 'sweet.'

I pity, but I condemn. In the name of Matuta, and of common sense, is there an imperative necessity that all our maids should become matrons?

If such exists, think, I beseech you, O virgins—pretty but penniless—apt for the yoke, how many chances of subjection may turn up, without rushing to put your necks under it. Is the aspiring race of H.E.I.C.S. cadets extinct? Are Erin's sons so good or so cold, as not to be tempted by woman, even without the gold? Are there not soldiers still to the fore, too inflammable to be trusted near an ammunition waggon? Are there not—the *bonne bouche* comes last—are there not priests and deacons? The instant that a man takes orders, celibacy becomes intolerable to him. I firmly believe that half the offers made in the year throughout broad England emanate from those energetic ecclesiastics.

After all, what specimens you do pick up sometimes, in your haste! If you *are* to lead apes, is it not better to defer the evil day as long as possible, instead of parading the animals about by your sides, here on this upper earth?

My sermon is too long for the occasion—too short for the text. I close a discourse, not much wiser, perhaps, than poor Wamba's, with his—'*Pax vobiscum!*'

Flora and Guy met with perfect composure on both sides. She did not appear to think that she had any claim upon him arising from what had passed; but it was evident he was still the favourite, and that all others were complete 'outsiders.' No betting-man would have backed the field for a shilling. She waltzed with him whenever he asked her, to the utter oblivion and annihilation of previous engagements; whereat the Frenchmen chafed inexpressibly, cursing and gnashing their teeth when, after the ball was over, they went forth into the outer darkness. Nothing but Livingstone's extraordinary reputation in the shooting-galleries, added to a certain ferocity of demeanour which had become habitual to him of late, saved him from more than one serious quarrel.

He took it all as a matter of course. Flora amused him, certainly: she sympathized with his tastes, and perhaps flattered his vanity. For instance, she always took an interest in his fortunes at play, watching and sometimes backing him at *écarté*, and often inquiring the next morning how the battle had gone in her absence at the Board of Green Cloth.

Once when an unfortunate adorer—in bitterness of spirit at being thrown over twice in one evening—hinted at some of the intrigues which had made Guy's name unenviably notorious (play was not the guiltiest of his distractions to thoughts that would come back) Miss Bellasys only smiled haughtily, and did not even deign to betray any curiosity on the subject. Those ephemeral passions were not the rivals she feared.

Her mother all this while was very uncomfortable. Though herself perfectly innocent of any connivance in Flora's schemes, she was afflicted with a perpetual indistinct sort of remorse. Once or twice, I believe, she did venture on a remonstrance, but she was put down decisively, and did not try it again.

One evening Guy had been lingering for some time in the Bellasys' box at the opera: as he went out into the *foyer* he saw an old acquaintance coming towards him.

Lord Killowen was past sixty: the world had used him roughly, and he had been ruined very early in life; but he bore both years and troubles lightly. Looking at his smooth forehead and square erect figure, and listening to his ready cheery laugh, you would never have guessed how long he had led that guerilla existence—for forty years keeping the bailiffs at bay. His nerve and his seat in the saddle were as firm as they were on the first night of his joining the —— Hussars, when he rode Kicking Kate over the iron pales round Hounslow Barrack-yard, and hit the layers of the long odds for a cool thousand.

He had been intimate with Colonel Livingstone, and had known his son from childhood; but he was a still closer friend of the Brandon family, with whom, indeed, he was distantly connected. He had never seen Guy since the breaking off of the latter's engagement till this night, when he caught a glimpse of his lofty head bending over Flora Bellasys' chair.

Lord Killowen's blood was as hot, and his impulses as quick, as if he had not yet seen his twentieth winter; and the chivalry within him was stirred at what he considered an insolent parade of treachery; for he had guessed much of what had happened, though he did not know all the truth. So he passed Guy's extended hand, turning his head studiously aside.

The latter was startled for a moment; but he could not believe in an intentional 'cut,' and he knew his friend to be rather short-sighted; so with one stride he overtook him, and, touching him on the shoulder, said, 'I must be very much changed if you do not know me, Lord Killowen.'

The brave old Irishman turned short upon his heel and confronted the speaker, bending on him all the light of his clear blue eyes: he drew himself up to the full height of a stature that nearly equalled Livingstone's, and said, coolly and slowly, 'Pardon me, you are not changed in the least; I know you very well.'

The insult was palpable. Guy fairly staggered, as if he had received a sword-thrust; then the angry blood rushed up to his temples, making the veins start out like muscles, and he spoke in a voice hoarse and indistinct with passion, 'You will answer this?'

True, his antagonist was more than old enough to have been his father; but in feast, field, and fray, Lord Killowen remembered his own age so seldom, that other men might be excused for forgetting it sometimes.

The old man was going to answer eagerly, but he checked himself with an effort, as if repressing a strong temptation ; when, after some seconds, he spoke, there was more of sadness and warning than of anger, in his tone.

'No ; I will not fight, even in this quarrel, with your father's son ; besides, I might be anticipating one who has a better right. Four days ago, Cyril Brandon landed from India.'

It would have been difficult, I think, to have found another, among living men, both by constitution and temperament, so inaccessible to material terrors as Livingstone ; yet when that name came upon him thus suddenly, he felt a thrill and a start through his nerves, so unpleasantly like commonplace physical fear, that ever, when he thought of it, it made his cheek burn with shame. He could not, after that, controvert gallant Lannes' maxim : 'It is only a coward who says that he never was afraid.'

He stood silently, and allowed Lord Killowen to pass him, bowing courteously, though coldly, to him. The latter never knew what mischief he had done. After that momentary sensation had passed off, all the worst elements of Guy's stubborn haughty nature rose in rebellion at what he deemed a despicable weakness. As if in defiance of the consequences, all that evening and on the succeeding days he devoted himself to Flora Bellasys with such unusual ardour that it made her nervous : she thought it was too good to last.

When Mohun heard what had happened, he would not admit that there was the slightest chance of a meeting with Cyril Brandon, though he knew the character of the latter—fierce and intractable to a degree.

'Don't flatter yourself you will wipe off the score in that way,' he said to Guy, with his sardonic laugh. 'Men will quarrel over cards and about *lorettes*, easily enough; but who fights for a "broken Covenant" now? We live two hundred years too late.'

Ralph remembered how long he had lingered on the French sea-board, waiting for a challenge from beyond the Channel, which never came; though there was deeper provocation to justify it.

A few mornings after this had occurred, Livingstone found himself without a servant. His demeanour towards this estimable class had always been imperious and stern to a fault; but latterly they, as well as others, had felt the effects of his exasperated temper, and he was sometimes brutally overbearing in his reprimands. On this particular occasion he must have been unusually oppressive, for it exhausted the patience of the much-enduring Willis; so that the worm turned again—insolently.

Before he had said ten words his master interrupted him—his eye turning towards a heavy horsewhip that lay near, with an expression that made Willis retreat towards the door.

'So you have robbed me of enough to make you independent? Very well! make your book up: the *maître d'hôtel* will settle with you. You will carry away some of my property, of course. I shall not trouble myself to have your trunks searched; but if you take anything that I happen to want afterwards, I'll have you arrested, wherever you are. Now go.'

The man left the room sulkily: an hour later he returned. 'I am going this instant, Mr Livingstone; but I could tell you something first that you ought to know, if you would promise not to be violent. I am very sorry now I did it.' There was a curious expression—half spiteful, half frightened—on his cunning face, as he spoke.

Guy looked at him carelessly. 'Thank you; I am in no humour to listen to your confessions. You may be quite easy; I give you credit for all imaginable rascality. Remember what I said; if I miss anything, the police will be after you the same day. Now, once more, go. If I see your face about here again, it will be the worse for you.'

There was a good deal of meaning in Willis's smile, though his lips were white with fear. 'You will never miss what I was going to tell you about, sir,' he said; and then faded away out of the room, with his usual noiseless step, closing the door softly behind him.

If his master could have guessed what was the secret he had refused to hear, haughty as he was, I do believe there is no earthly degradation to which he would not have abased himself to gain its knowledge.

But the hour for the humbling of the strong, self-reliant nature had not come yet, though it was very near. The wild bull never saw the net till its meshes had trapped him fast

The same morning, Guy, who was lounging an hour away at the Bellasys', mentioned to them what had occurred. If he had glanced at Flora's face just then, he would have been puzzled to guess what there was in the intelligence to turn her so deadly pale. It was only for an instant that the accomplished actress forgot her part; and when he looked at her next, there was not a trace of emotion in her face.

'Have you filled up his place?' she asked, carelessly.

'I have ordered my landlord to provide me,' replied Guy. 'I shall find some well-trained scoundrel on my return, I hope. I shall never get another like Willis, though. It's just my luck. The great principle of the Gazelle runs through life. When they come to know you well, &c. What made you ask? Surely you have no *protégée* to recommend?'

Flora laughed gaily, as she answered in the negative, and so the subject dropped; but all the afternoon she was pensive and absent, and flashes of vexation gleamed every now and then fitfully in her stormy eyes.

CHAPTER XXVI.

Let none think to fly the danger,
For, soon or late, Love is his own avenger.

Christmas-tide had come round again; and hall, manor-house, and castle were filling fast. But the pheasants had a jubilee at Kerton to the great discouragement of Mallet, who 'could not mind such another breeding season.'

Foxes were strong and plentiful with the Belvoir and the Pytchley; and, during two months of open weather, many a straightgoer had died gallantly in the midst of the wide pasture-grounds, testifying with his last breath to the generalship of Goodall and Payne. But the best shot and the hardest rider in Northamptonshire lingered on still in Paris, wasting his patrimony in most riotous living, and trying his iron constitution presumptuously.

Lady Catherine sat alone in the grey old house, paler and more careworn than ever. I think she would have preferred the noisiest revel that ever broke her slumbers in the old times, to the dead silence that brooded like a mist in the deserted rooms.

Guy had always been a bad correspondent, and now he hardly ever wrote to her; but rumours of his wild life reached his mother often, though dimly and vaguely. It was best so: what would that poor lady have felt if she could have guessed at the scene in which her son was the principal figure as the Christmas morning was breaking?

It is the close of a furious orgie; the Babel of cries, of fragments of songs, of insane meaningless laughter, is dying away, through the pure exhaustion of the revellers; on the gay carpet and the rich damask are pools of spilt liquors, heaps of shivered glass, and bouquets and garlands that have ceased to be fragrant hours ago. All around in different attitudes—ignoble and helpless—are strewn the bodies of those who have gone down early in the battle of the Bacchanals: they lie in their ranks as they fell. One figure towers above the rest—pre-eminent as Satan in the conclave of the ruined angels—the guiltiest, because the most conscious of his own utter degradation. The frequent draughts that have prostrated his companions have only brought out two round scarlet spots in the pale bronze of his cheeks; his voice retains still its deep, calm, almost solemn tone. Listen to it, as he raises to his lips an immense glass brimming-full of Burgundy—'One toast more, and with funeral honours —"To the memory of those who have fallen gloriously on the 24th of December."'

It is true that, six months ago, the soft, pure cheek of Constance Brandon rested often on the broad breast that pillows now the dishevelled head of that wild-eyed, shrill-voiced Mænad? Draw the curtains closer yet: shut out the dawn of the Nativity, for very shame.

Mohun was breakfasting with Livingstone on a cold, gusty January morning that succeeded a night of heavy drinking and heavier play. The Colonel would see him through one of these readily enough; but if there was even a single female face present, he would retreat in disgust and contempt unutterable. Guy had been hit so hard, that it made him graver than usual as he thought of it, though he was tolerably inured and indifferent to evil fortune; so the conversation languished during the meal. After it was over, Mohun rose to light a cigar, while his companion took up a pile of letters and began to glance at them listlessly. Suddenly the former dropped the match from his hand, starting in irrepressible astonishment.

He had seen strong men die hard, mangled and shattered by sabre or bullet; but he had never heard a sound so terribly significant of agony as the dull, heavy groan that, just then, burst from Livingstone's lips.

In those few seconds his face had grown perfectly livid: his eyes were riveted upon a small note that he held in his shaking fingers; they glittered strangely, but there was no meaning or expression in their fixed stare.

'In the name of God, what has happened?' Ralph asked.

Guy's lips worked and moved; but no sound came from them, except an irregular catching of the breath, and a gasping rattle in the throat.

Mohun took the note from his hand without his seeming to be aware of it, and read it through. These were the words:—

'I have tried very hard to persuade myself that you never received the letter I wrote to you two months ago. I think you would have answered it, for you would know how much I must have suffered before my pride broke down so utterly. Yet I could not have risked being scorned a second time, if I had not learnt yesterday that my life must now be reckoned by weeks, if not by days. I do not know if I shall be allowed to see you, if you come. But you will come; will you not? Dear, dear Guy, I cannot die as I ought to do, contentedly, unless I speak to you once again. In spite of all, I will sign my last letter,

'Your own,

'CONSTANCE BRANDON.'

It was dated Ventnor.

Hard and cynical as he was, Mohun was thoroughly shocked and grieved; but the urgency of the crisis brought back the prompt decision of thought and purpose that were habitual to the trained soldier. He sprang to his feet, alert and ready for action, as he would have done in the old times, from his bivouac, to meet a night surprise of the wild Hungarians.

'Get everything ready,' he said to the servant, who entered at that moment; 'your master is going to England immediately. The train starts for Havre at two o'clock. You will catch the night boat for Southampton.'

When the man had left the room, he turned to Guy—'Rouse yourself, man! There is all a lifetime for remorse, but only a few hours for the little amends you can make. You will be at Ventnor to-morrow; and mind—you *must* see her, whatever difficulties may be thrown in your way. You won't lose your temper if you meet her brother? Ah! I see you are not listening.'

Then Livingstone spoke for the first time, in a hoarse, grating whisper, articulating the words one by one, with difficulty.

'I never dreamt of this. I did not mean to kill her.'

Mohun knew his friend too well to attempt consolation or sympathy, even if these had not been foreign to his own nature, so he answered deliberately and coldly—

'Of having brought bitter sorrow on Constance Brandon, I do hold you guilty; of having caused her death—not; and so you will find when you know all. But her note of two months ago—of course you never saw it? You must have overlooked it; you are so careless with your papers.'

'It never reached me,' Livingstone replied. 'I have always looked at the outside of my letters, and I should have known that handwriting among ten thousand. Some one must have intercepted it. I wish I knew who.' He was recovering from the first stunning effects of the shock, and the old angry light came back into his eyes.

'I will find out when you are gone,' said Mohun. 'You have not a moment to spare. I won't ask you to write; I will join you in England in three days. Only remember one thing—keep cool. Yes; I know what you mean; but your patience may be tried more than you have any idea of.' He was thinking of Cyril Brandon.

The hurry of departure prevented any further conversation. At the station, just before the train started, Ralph said, grasping his comrade's hand as he spoke—'I did not think you loved her so dearly.'

It was very long before he forgot the dreary look which accompanied the answer—'I did not know it myself till now.'

'I must trace the note,' the Colonel muttered, as he strode away from the station. 'That handsome tiger-cat has laid her claw on it, I am certain. But she won't confess; red-hot pincers would not drag a secret from her, if she meant to keep it. I doubt if she will even betray herself by a blush. Poor Constance! What chance had she against such a Machiavel in petticoats? I am bad at diplomacy, too. If I only had the slightest proof, or if she had any weak point. Unless she loses her head when she hears where Guy is gone, I have no chance of finding out much in that quarter. There's Willis, to be sure. She bribed him, no doubt. D—n them both!' In this complimentary and charitable mood, he went straight to Flora Bellasys.

He found her alone. She was sitting in her riding-dress; and the broad Spanish hat, with its curling plumes, lay close beside her, with the gauntlets and whip across it.

She did not much like Mohun, for she had an idea that his sarcasms, with her for their object, had made Guy smile more than once approvingly. She knew, too, that all her fascinations recoiled harmlessly from that rugged block of ironstone. Whatever he might have been in early years, he was harder of heart than stout Sir Artegall now. Radigund, unhelming her lovely face, would never have tempted him to forego his advantage and throw his weapons down.

However, she greeted him with perfect composure and satisfaction.

'Do you join our party this afternoon, Colonel Mohun? I expect them to call for me every moment. We are going to the Croix de Berny, to see the ground for the race next week. Mr Livingstone was to have lunched here; but I never reckon on his keeping an engagement.'

There was something in Ralph's manner which made her uncomfortable. She took up her whip, and began twisting its slender stock rather nervously; you would not have thought there was so much strength in the delicate fingers.

'You are right,' he replied, coolly, 'not to count too much on Guy's punctuality. He *is* very uncertain in his movements. I fear he cannot accompany you this afternoon. He would have charged me with his excuses, I am sure, if he had not been so hurried.'

Flora looked up quickly.

'It must have been something very sudden, then. Have you any idea where he is now?'

Ralph consulted his watch. 'About Mantes, I should imagine. He started for Havre by the last train. He will be at Southampton to-morrow; and the same day he can reach—.'

He stopped, gazing at his companion with a cold, cruel satisfaction. The blood was sinking in her cheeks, not with a sudden impulse, but gradually—as the sunset rose-tints fade from the brow of the Jungfrau, leaving a ghastly opaque whiteness behind them. During the silence that ensued, a sharp tinkle might be heard, as the jewelled head of the riding-whip, snapped by a convulsive movement, fell at Flora's feet.

It *was* weak in her to betray such loss of self-command; but remember the blow came unexpectedly. She saw the edifice she had plotted, and toiled, and risked so much to build, ruined and shattered to its foundation-stone. How many whispers, and smiles, and eloquent glances had been lavished, only to end in this Pavia, where not even honour was saved from the utter wreck!

Was not the perfect waxen mask of the First Napoleon shivered in that terrible Abdication-night at Fontainebleau? Where was Cleopatra's queenly dignity when she heard that Antony had rejoined Octavia?

'Why has he gone? What called him back?'

Her voice had lost the clear ring of silver, and sounded dull and flat, like base metal.

'Constance Brandon wrote to tell him she was dying. Do you wonder that he went to her?'

A passing cloud of horror swept across Flora's pale face; but after it broke forth a gleam of strange ferocious exultation, which stifled the rising pity in her hearer's breast, and changed it into contempt.

'I don't believe it,' she cried, passionately. 'It is a trick. She was quite well two months ago. At least, she said nothing—.'

She checked herself, but too late. The practised duellist laughed grimly in his moustache, as he might have done on discovering the weak point in his enemy's ward which laid him open to his rapier.

'You make my task easier,' he said; 'I came to inquire about a note which miscarried about the time you speak of. I *will* know what became of it, Miss Bellasys, though I wish to spare you unnecessary exposure and shame.'

He had gained a momentary advantage, but it did not profit him much. There are swordsmen who will not own that they are touched, though their life-blood is ebbing fast. Flora rose without a sign of yielding or weakness in her dry eyes, drawing up her magnificent figure proudly. Ralph could not help thinking how like her father she was just then.

'I will answer, though I deny your right to question me. I have not the faintest idea of what you refer to. I have seen no note, except such as were addressed to myself: and you will hardly think that Miss Brandon would choose me as a *confidante* or correspondent.'

Mohun saw that she would persist to the last, undaunted as Sapphira. So he rose to leave her, without another word.

'You do not doubt me?' Flora asked, as he turned away, after saluting her. It was a rash question, all things considered, and scarcely worthy of the accomplished speaker. There is no more useful maxim in diplomacy than this—*Quieta non movere.*

Ralph faced her directly. 'Miss Bellasys, when a lady tells me what I cannot believe, I question—not her word, but—her agent.' He was half-way down-stairs before she could answer or detain him.

He found out Willis's direction at Guy's hotel; but he had to wait some time before obtaining it; and other things delayed him *en route*, so that it was nearly two hours before he reached the modest lodgings *au quatrième*, where the discharged valet was hiding his greatness.

Willis had an extensive connection; this, and his well-known talents, made him tolerably sure of a situation whenever he chose to seek one. He had luxurious tastes, and thoroughly appreciated self-indulgence; so he determined to devote some time and a portion of his perquisites to relaxation, before going into harness again.

On this particular evening he had in prospect a little dinner at Philippe's—not uncheered by the smiles of venal beauty—and had just completed a careful toilette. He was above the small peculations of his order; indeed, had he been inclined to plunder his late master's wardrobe, the absurd disproportion in their size would have saved him from that vulgar temptation. He was somewhat choice in his tailors; and his clothes fitted him and suited him well. He was reviewing the general effect in the glass with a complacent, and rather *égrillarde* expression in his little eyes, when—between him and his *partie fine*—rose the apparition of the Colonel, like that of the commander before a bolder profligate. He knew that the interview must come, and did not wish to avoid it; but just at this moment it was singularly ill timed. What a contrast between the stern fixed gaze that seemed to nail him to the spot where he stood and the well-tutored glances of fair, frail Héloise! He felt as if he had been put into the ice-pail by mistake for the champagne. However, he met his ill-luck placidly, and, handing his visitor a chair, begged to know 'what he could do to serve him?'

'You can tell me what became of a letter from Miss Brandon, which ought to have reached your master two months ago, and miscarried.'

Willis was forewarned and armed for the question; but, even with this advantage given in, his blank unconscious look and start of astonishment did him infinite credit.

'A letter, sir?' he said, vaguely, as if consulting his recollections. 'From Miss Brandon? I have never seen or heard of such a thing. If I had, of course I should have given it to Mr Livingstone. What else could I have done with it?'

'I will give a thousand francs for it,' Mohun went on, without noticing the denial, 'or for a written acknowledgment of how you disposed of it, and at whose orders.' He laid the bank-note on the table.

The flats changed; the look of bewilderment gave place to one of injured innocence—an appeal against manifest injustice. It was really artistically done.

'I am sorry, sir, that you should think I want a bribe to serve you or Mr Livingstone. It is quite out of my power now. I don't know what you refer to.'

'I have no time to bargain,' Ralph growled, and his eyes began to glisten ominously. 'Name your price and have done with it.'

Finale and grand tableau—virtuous indignation—the faithful servant asserting his dignity as a man. There was a hitch here somewhere; the scene-shifter was hardly up to his work, so that it was rather a failure.

'I have told you twice, sir, that I do not know anything about it. I beg you will not insult me with more questions. You have no right to do so; I am neither in your service nor Mr Livingstone's now.'

Mohun bent his bushy brows in some perplexity. After all he had not a shadow of proof, though he felt a moral certainty. His sheet-anchor was the avarice of the scoundrel he was dealing with, and this seemed to fail. Evidently a strong counter-influence had been at work.

'Curse her!' he muttered between his clenched teeth; 'she has been here before me.'

Then he looked up suddenly, and what he saw caused the shallow cup of his patience at once to overflow.

In Willis's eyes was an ill-repressed twinkle of exultation and amusement, and on his thin lips the dawning of an actual sneer. It was but seldom the trained satellite allowed himself the luxury of betraying any natural feeling. In truth he chose his time badly for its exhibition now. Before he could collect himself so as to utter a cry, he lay upon his back on the carpet, a heavy foot on his chest; and the Colonel was gazing down on him with a fell murderous expression, that made the victim's blood run cold.

'By G—d!' Mohun said, in the smothered tones of concentrated passion, 'if you trifle with me ten seconds longer—if you open your lips except to answer my question—I'll crush your breast-bone in.'

Willis knew the desperate character of the man who held him in his power; it was no vain threat he had just heard; the pressure on his breast was agonizing already.

'For God's sake, don't murder me!' he gasped out; 'I—I gave it to Miss Bellasys.'

'Of course you did,' Mohun said, coolly; 'I knew it all along. Now get up, and write that down.'

He spurned away the fallen man as he spoke, till he rolled over and over on the floor.

There is nothing which disconcerts a nature long used to obey like a sudden brutal *coup-de-main*. Remember the Scythians and their slaves. The rebels met their masters boldly enough on a fair field with sword and spear, but they cowered before the crack of the horse-whips.

All the spider-webs of the unfortunate Willis's diplomacy were utterly swept away; his powers of thought and volition were concentrated now on one point—to get rid of his visitor as soon as possible.

He rose slowly and painfully (for the mere physical shock had been heavy), and placing himself at a table, tried to write the few words of acknowledgment that Mohun dictated; but his hand trembled so excessively that he could hardly form the letters. As he looked up, in piteous deprecation, evidently fearing lest his inability to comply should be construed into unwillingness or rebellion, he presented a spectacle of degraded humanity, so revolting in its abasement that even the cynic turned away in painful disgust.

It was done at last. As Willis saw his confession consigned to Mohun's pocket-book, his avarice gave him courage to try one last effort to gain something by the transaction—a salve to his bruises; a set-off against the *relicta non bene parmula.*

'I hope you will consider I have done all I can, sir,' he said, looking wistfully at the bank-note, which still lay on the table. 'I shall be ruined if this becomes known.'

The cast-steel smile which was peculiar to him hardened the Colonel's face.

'You must come down on Miss Bellasys for compensation. She pays well, I have no doubt. You never get another *sou* from our side, if it were to keep you from starving. My second thought was the best after all; it saved time—and money.' (He put the note back into his purse.) 'I'll give you one caution, though. Keep out of Mr Livingstone's way. If he meets you, after hearing all this, he'll break your neck, I believe in my conscience.' So he left him.

For the second time in the evening Willis looked in the glass—the reflection was not so satisfactory. Was that unseemly crumpled ruin, the white tie, sublime in its scientific wrinkles, on which its author had gazed with a pardonable paternal pride? No wonder that he stamped in wrath, not the less bitter because impotent, while he shook off the dust from his garments as a testimony against Ralph Mohun.

He repaired the damages though, to the best of his power, and then went off to keep his appointment; but the *pâtés à la bechamelle* were as ashes, and the *gelée au marasquin* as gall, to his parched, disordered palate. He made himself so intensely disagreeable, that poor Héloise thenceforth swore an enmity against his compatriots, which endured to the end of her brief misspent existence. *Gredin d'Anglais, va!'* she was wont to say, grinding her little white teeth melodramatically, whenever she recalled that dreary entertainment, and the failure of her simple stratagems to enliven her saturnine host.

CHAPTER XXVII.

> Then let the funeral bells be tolled, a requiem be sung,
> An anthem for the queenliest dead that ever died so young;
> A dirge for her,—the doubly dead, in that she died so young.

For the first few minutes after the train had moved off, Guy was unable to collect his thoughts. As the tall figure of Mohun passed from his view, it seemed as if a sustaining prop had been suddenly cut away from under him, and he felt more than ever helpless. The stubborn strength of his character asserted itself before long, and he faced his great sorrow as he would have done an enemy in bodily shape; but neither then, nor for many days after, could he pursue any one train of reflection long unbroken.

First he began to think how Constance would look when he saw her. Would she be much changed? How beautiful she was the night they parted, with the blue myosotis gleaming through her bright hair! Would her eyes be as cold as he remembered them then (he had not seen their *last* look), or would they forgive him at once, and tell him so? Not if she knew all. And then, in hideous contrast to her pure stately beauty, there rose before him faces and figures which had shared his orgies during the past months, gay with paint and jewels, and meretricious ornament. There was a deeper horror in those mocking shapes than in the most loathsome phantasms of corporeal corruption that feverish dreams ever called up from the graveyard. If his lips were unworthy, months ago, to touch Constance's cheek or hand, what were they now? He ground his teeth in the bitterness of self-condemnation. It would be easier to bear, if she met him coldly and proudly, than if she yielded at once, as her letter seemed to promise. Her letter!—what became of the first one? If that had reached him, how much might have been saved! Perhaps Constance's life—certainly much of his own dishonour. The idea did cross him, that Flora might have been concerned in intercepting it; but it seemed improbable, and he drove it away. With all his revived devotion to Constance, he did not like to think hardly of her rival; in a lesser degree he had wronged her too.

You will rarely find the sternest or wisest of men disposed to be harsh towards errors that spring from a devotion to themselves. It is only just, as well as natural, that it should be so. If the Second Cause of the crime did not find an excuse for the defendant, I don't know where he or she would look for an advocate. St Kevin need not have troubled himself: there were plenty of people ready to push poor Kathleen down. I think it is a pity they canonized him.

Through all Guy's reflections there ran this undercurrent—'how easily all might have been avoided if the slightest things had turned out differently!' Just so, after a heavy loss at play, a man *will* keep thinking how he might have won a large stake, if he had played one card otherwise, or backed the In instead of the Out. I have heard good judges say, that this pertinacious after-thought is the hardest part to bear of all the annoyance. Of course he worries himself about it—just as if 'great results from small beginnings' were not the tritest of all truisms. I don't wish to be historical, or I would reflect how often the Continent has been convulsed by a dish that disagreed with some one, or by a ship that did not start to its time. The Jacobites were very wise in toasting 'the little gentleman in black velvet,' that raised the fatal mole-hill. Does not the old romance say, that an adder starting from a bush brought on the terrible battle, in which all the chivalry of England were strewn like leaves around Arthur, on Barren-Down?

Guy could still hardly realize to himself the certainty of Constance's approaching death. He tried to fix his thoughts on this, till a heavy, listless torpor, like drowsiness, began to steal over him. He roused himself impatiently, and began to think how slow they were going. Nevertheless, the green *coteaux* that swell between Rouen and the sea were flying past rapidly, and they arrived at Havre as Mohun had said, just in time to catch the Southampton packet.

There was threatening of foul weather to windward. The clouds, in masses of indigo just edged with copper, were banking up fast, and the 'white horses,' more and more frequent, were beginning to toss their manes against the dark sky-line.

To the few travellers, whom the stern necessities of business drove forth, lingering and shivering, from their comfortable inns on to the deck, already wet and unsteady, Livingstone was an object of great interest and many theories. His impatience to be gone was so marked, that the conscientious official looked more than once suspiciously at his passport.

Mr Phineas Hackett, of Boston, U.S., Marchand (so self-described in the Livre des Voyageurs at Chamounix), made up his mind that he saw before him the hero of some gigantic forgery, or a fraudulent bankrupt on a large scale; but, just as he had fixed on the astute question which was to drive the first wedge into the mystery, Guy turned in his quick walk and met him full. I doubt if he even saw the smooth-shaven eager face close at his elbow; but he was thinking again of the lost letter, and the savage glare in his eyes made the heart of the 'earnest inquirer' quiver under his black satin waistcoat. 'D—d hard knot, that,' he muttered, disconsolately, and retreated with great loss, to writhe during the rest of the passage in an orgasm of unsatisfied curiosity.

The weather looked worse every moment, as the wild north wind came roaring from seaward, with a challenge to the vessels that lay tossing within the jetty to come forth and meet him. The waste-pipe of the *Sea-gull* screamed out shrilly in answer; and the brave old ship, shaking the foam from her bows after every plunge, as her namesake might do from its breast-feathers, steamed out right in the teeth of the gale.

A regular 'Channel night'—a night which Mr Augustus Winder, Paris traveller to H—— and Co., the mighty mercers of Regent Street, spoke of in after days, with a shudder of reminiscence mingling with the pride of one who has endured and survived great peril; who has gone down to the sea in ships, and seen the wonders of the deep. His associates—the *élite* of the silk and ribbon department—youths of polished manners and fascinating address, than whom *non alii leviore saltu* took the counter in their stride—would gather round the narrator in respectful admiration; just as the young sea-dogs of Nantucket might listen to a veteran hunter of the sperm-whale, as he tells of a hurricane that caught him in the strait between the Land of Fire and terrible Cape Horn.

Mr Winder represented himself as having assisted all on board, from the captain down to the cabin-boy, with his counsel and encouragement, and as having been materially useful to the man at the wheel. The fact was, that he cried a good deal during the night, and was incessant in his appeals to the steward and to Heaven for help. In his appeals to the latter Power, he employed often a strangely modified form of the Apostles' Creed; for his religious education had been neglected, and this was his solitary and simple idea of an orison. However, no one was present to detract from his triumph, or to controvert his concluding words—'An awful night, gents; but duty's duty, and the firm behaved handsome. Mr Sassnett, I'll trouble you for a light, sir.' And so he ignited a fuller-flavoured Cuba, and drank, in a sweeter grog, 'our noble selves'—*olim hæc meminisse juvabat.*

There was one striking contrast on board to the gallant Winder. Livingstone did not go below, but walked the deck all night long, straining his eyes eagerly forward through the thick darkness and the driving rain.

Captain Weatherby regarded him approvingly, as, halting in his walk, Guy stood near him upright and steady as a mainmast of Memel pine. 'That's the sort I like to carry,' the old sailor remarked confidentially to his second-in-command, as they shared an amicable grog under the shelter of the companion.

The wind abated towards morning; and, as the dawn broke, they were under the lee of the Wight, and moving steadily into the quiet Solent.

Guy made his way straight to Ventnor. Twenty-four hours after her summons reached him, Constance knew that her lover had never received her first letter, and that now he was within five hundred yards of her, waiting to be called into her presence.

It was long before her answer came. It only contained a few hurried words, saying, that it was impossible for her to see him that day, and begging him not to be angry, but to wait. The handwriting was far more faltering and uncertain than that which had struck him so painfully with its weakness the day before. It spoke plainly of the effort which it had cost the invalid to trace even those brief lines. He did not try to delude himself any more: but all that day remained alone, face to face with his despair.

He went out after nightfall, and stole up cautiously to the house where Constance was staying.

It is not only ghosts that *walk*. Men, as powerless to retrieve the past as if they were already disembodied spirits, *will* haunt the scenes and sepulchres of their lost happiness, even before they die. Though the world was all before them where to choose, I doubt not that the exiles from Paradise lingered long, just without the sweep of the Flaming Sword.

Two rooms in the house were lighted, one with the faint glimmer peculiar to the shaded lamp of a sick-room. Guy's pulse bounded wildly at first, and then grew dull and still. In that room he knew Constance lay dying. The other window was brightly lighted, but half shaded by a curtain. While he gazed, this was torn suddenly aside, as if by an angry impatient hand, and a man leant out, throwing back the hair from his forehead, to catch the cold wind which was blowing sharply. Guy had never seen the dark passionate face before; but he knew whose it was very well, though there was little family likeness to guide him. Cyril Brandon's features were small and finely cut, like his sister's; but there the resemblance ended. His complexion, naturally sallow, had been burnt three shades deeper by the Indian sun. His fierce black eyes, and thin lips that seemed always ready to curl or quiver, made the contrast with Constance very striking.

Livingstone drew back into the farthest shadow of the garden trees. He knew how much reason Cyril had for hating him above all living men; and he did not wish to risk a meeting. Mohun's warning shot across his mind, and he felt it was rightly founded.

Brandon looked out for some minutes without moving, then he dropped his head suddenly on his arms with a heavy groan. The bright light was behind him, and Guy could see his clasped fingers twisting and tearing at each other, as if he wished to distract mental agony by the sense of bodily pain.

The gazer saw that another besides himself had given up all hope; and, with a heavier heart than ever, he stole away home—not to sleep, but to think, and wait for the morning.

About noon next day the expected message came.

'Dear Guy,—I have got leave to see you at last, but it was very difficult to gain. It is only on these conditions—you are not to stay with me a moment beyond three hours; and you must leave Ventnor immediately afterwards, and not return. I have promised all for you. It seems very hard; but we must not think of that now. Come directly.

'C. B.'

Ten minutes later there was only a closed door between Livingstone and the interview he longed for and dreaded so much. His steel nerves stood him in good stead then; it was not at the crisis that these were likely to fail. When Constance heard his step, it was measured and firmly planted as she always remembered it. So it would have been, if he had been walking to meet the fire of a platoon. Her aunt, Mrs Vavasour, was with her, but left the room as Guy opened the door, and so they met again as they had parted—alone.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

I charge thee, by the living's prayer,
By the dead's silentness,
To wring from out thy soul a cry
That God may hear and bless ;
Lest Heaven's own palm fade in my hand,
And, pale among the saints, I stand
A saint companionless.

Constance was lying on a couch near the fire propped up by many pillows. She felt weaker than usual: what she had gone through in the morning had exhausted her. Guy never knew, till long after, that the effort she had made to secure the meeting with him had, in all human probability, shortened her life by weeks. She thought it cheaply purchased at that price,—and she was right. Even the excitement of the moment had hardly brought a tinge of colour into the pure waxen cheeks ; but the beautiful clear eyes were more brilliant than ever. A ribbon of the blue which was Guy's favourite was twisted in her bright glossy hair.

He saw nothing of this at first ; he did not see her raise herself with a faint joyful cry, as he advanced with his eyes cast down ; he never knew how it was that he found himself kneeling by Constance, with her arms clinging fondly round his neck, and her voice murmuring in his ear,—'I said you would come—I knew you would come.'

Though her soft cheek lay so very near his lips, they never touched it. He drew back, shuddering all over, and said, hoarsely—

'I cannot; I dare not; I am not worthy.'

I do not know if she guessed what he meant; but she tried to lift his head which was bent down on the cushion beside her, so that he might look into her true eyes, as she answered—

You must not think that; you must not say so. I know you have been angry and almost mad for many months, but you are not so now, and you never will be any more. It was my fault;—yes, mine. If I had not been so cold and proud, you would never have left me. You thought I did not love you; but I did; my own, my darling; I did—so dearly!'

All Guy's stout manhood was shivered within him, utterly and suddenly, as 4000 years ago the rock was cloven in Horeb, the Mount of God. Now, too, from the rift in the granite the waters flowed: the first tears that he had shed since he was a very little child—the last that any mortal saw there—streamed hot and blinding from his eyes down on the thin transparent hand that he held fast.

Would those with whom he was a byword for hard sternness of character, have known him then? They would have been almost as much surprised to see Constance Brandon—though so haughty and cold—overcoming her terror at his passionate burst of grief, to soothe him with every tenderest gesture and with words that were each a caress, till the convulsion passed away, and calm self-government returned.

Guy did not speak till he could quite control himself; then he said firmly, but with a sob in his voice still—

'Yet I have killed you!'

'No, no,' Constance answered, quickly: 'indeed it is not so. A cold which attacked my chest caused this illness; but they say that my lungs were affected long ago, and that I could hardly have lived many months. You must think of that, dear; and perhaps it is much better that it should be so. Life is very hard and difficult, I think; and I should never have been strong enough to bear my part in it well.'

Guy shook his head sadly, is if only half convinced; though he knew she would not have said an untrue word, even to save him from suffering.

'If you could only stay with me—if I could only keep you!' he cried out, and threw his arms round her, as if their strong clasp would hold her back one step on the road, along which the messengers of God had been beckoning her for many days past.

'Hush!' Constance whispered: 'you must be patient. Yet I like to think that you will not forget me soon. Now, listen—' and she held up her finger, with something of the 'old imperial air.' 'I have something to ask of you. Will you not like to do it for my sake, even if it is hard?'

He did not answer; but she understood the pressure of his hand, and went on.

'I have been fearing so much that something terrible will happen between you and Cyril. He is so passionate and wilful, he will not listen to me; though he loves me dearly, and though I have tried every entreaty I could think of.' (She grew paler than ever, and shuddered visibly.) 'And you are not patient, Guy, dear; but you would be, this time, would you not? Only think how it would grieve me if—'

The deep hollow cough that she had tried hard to keep back *would* break in here.

'You cannot doubt me,' Guy replied, caressing her fondly: 'I promise that nothing he can say or do shall tempt me to defend myself by word or deed. How could I, even if you had not asked this? Has he not bitter cause? Ask me something harder, my own!'

Constance hesitated; then she spoke rapidly, as if afraid to pause, when she had once made up her mind. The lovely colour came and flickered for a moment on her cheek, and then went out again as suddenly.

'I know it is easier for me to submit than for you; yet it is very hard to be obliged to leave you, Guy:

it is harder still to leave you to Flora Bellasys I hope my jealousy—I *am* jealous—does not make me unjust; but I don't think she will make you better, or even happier in the end. Now, do forgive me; perhaps I ought not—'

Guy interrupted here: he had not stopped her till she began to excuse herself.

'I must see her once again' (the knitting of his black brows omened ill for the peace of that interview); 'afterwards, on my honour and faith, I will never speak to her one word, or willingly look upon her face.'

O true heart! that had suffered so long, and hitherto unavailingly, till your life-blood was drained in the struggle, be content, for the victory is won at last. Never did loyalty and right triumph more absolutely, since those who stood fast by their King in the *dies iræ* of the great battle saw the rebel angels cast headlong down.

If, in the intense joy that thrilled through every fibre of Constance's frame, there mingled an element of gratified pride, who shall blame her? Not I; for fear of being less indulgent than, I believe, was her Eternal Judge, when, not many days later, she stood before him.

She needed no further protest or explanation; she never thought that, because her lover had once been entangled, there was danger of his falling into the net again; she never doubted, for an instant,—and she was right. The gaze of the spirit is far-seeing and rarely fallible, when so near its translation as was hers.

As she leant her head against his shoulder, murmuring, 'You have made me so very, very happy,' there were pleasant tears in the beautiful eyes that had known so many bitter ones, and had not lost their brightness yet.

There was silence for some minutes; then Constance spoke again, looking wistfully, and more sadly than she had yet done, on her companion—

'Do you know, Guy, I have been thinking that yours will not be a very long life. You are so strong, that it seems foolish in me; but I cannot help it.'

The faintest glimmer of satisfaction, like the ghost of a smile, came upon Livingstone's miserable haggard face: there had been nothing like it there for many hours: there was nothing like it again for many days.

'You may be right,' he said, very calmly. 'I trust in God you are.'

'Yes,' Constance went on; 'but I was thinking more than that. I was hoping that, perhaps, for my sake, if not for your own, you would try to grow better every day. Only think what it would be, if, throughout all ages, we were never to meet after to-day.' She drew him closer to her, and her voice almost failed her. 'I don't believe you ever could be what is called a very religious character. I am so weak—strong-minded as you thought me—that I fear I have found an attraction in this fault of yours: but you could keep from great sins, I am sure. Try and be gentler to others first; and with every act of unselfish kindness, you will have gained something. Any good clergyman will tell you the rest better than I. Remember how happy you will make me. I believe I shall see and know it all. It may be hard for you, dear, but, it may not be for long.'

The same strange, wistful look came into her eyes again, as if shadows of the dim future were passing before them.

Poor child! Pure as she was in principle and firm in truth, she would have made but a weak controversial theologian; but her simple words went straight to her hearer's heart, with a stronger power of conversion than could have been found in the discourses of all the surpliced Chrysostoms that ever anathematized a sinner or anatomized a creed.

Yet Guy did not answer so soon this time. When he did, he spoke firmly and resolutely—'Indeed, indeed, I will try.'

Constance nestled down on his broad chest, wearily, but with a long-drawn breath of intense relief.

'I have said all my say,' she whispered; 'I have not tired you? Now, I will rest, and you shall pet me, and talk to me as you used to do.'

What broken sentences—what pauses of silence yet more eloquent—what lavish, tender caresses passed between those two, over whom the shadow of desolation was closing fast, I have never guessed, nor if I could, would I write them in these pages. I hold, that there are partings bitterer to bear than a father's from his child, and sorrows worthier of the veil than those of Agamemnon.

Though Guy repressed now all outward signs of painful emotion, he suffered, I believe, far the most of the two. It is always so with those whom death is about to divide. The agony is unequally distributed, falling heaviest on the one that remains behind. If the separation were for years, and both were healthy and hopeful, very often the positions would be reversed; but—whether it be that bodily weakness blunts the sharp sense of anticipated sorrow, or that, to eyes bent forward on the glories and terrors of the Unknown world, earthly relations lessen by comparison—you will find that with most, however impetuous it may have been in mid-channel, the River of Life flows calmly and evenly, just before its junction with the Great Ocean Stream. Besides, the dying girl had suffered so much of late, that the present change left no room for other feelings than those of unalloyed happiness; and the words of love murmured into her ear brought with them a deeper delight than when she heard them for the first time from the same lips.

Both were so engaged with their own thoughts and with each other that they never noted how the narrow space of time allotted to them was vanishing, rapidly as the last dry islet of sand when the spring-tide is flowing. They never heard the footsteps, more impatient at every turn, sounding from the room beneath, where Cyril Brandon paced to and fro. Constance had cut off one of her long sunny braids, and was twining it, in and out, in fetterlocks round Guy's fingers, as she lay nestling in the clasp of his other arm ; it was only their eyes that were speaking then. They started, as the door opened suddenly, and Mrs Vavasour came in, her face white, and her eyes wild with terror. She was too frightened to be gentle or considerate.

'You must go this instant !' she cried out, catching Livingstone's arm. 'Constance ! make him go ; he has stayed too long already. You know you promised.'

'I did promise,' Constance answered, calmly, almost proudly ; 'and he will keep it.'

Then she turned to Guy, who was kneeling by her, and hid her face in his neck, locking her arms round him. Her aunt caught the words—'Not forget !' Beyond these her farewell was a secret known only to her lover and the angels.

But the parting, which had come so suddenly, drained the last weak remnant of strength already taxed too hardly. Guy felt the lips that were murmuring in his ear grow still at first, and then cold ;

the tender arms unknit themselves; and his imploring eyes could draw no answer from hers that were closed.

'She has only fainted,' Mrs Vavasour said, answering his look; 'I will recover her. But pray, pray go!'

He laid the light burden that scarcely weighed upon his arm down on the pillows, very softly and gently, smoothing them mechanically with his hand. Then he stooped and pressed one kiss more on the pale lips; they never felt it, though the passion of that lengthened caress might almost have waked the dead. And so those two parted, to meet again—upon earth, never any more.

The next time that a woman's lips touched Guy Livingstone's they were his mother's, and he had been a corpse an hour.

He went, without looking back; his step was slow and unsteady, very different from the firm even tread of three hours ago. The power of volition and self-direction was very nearly gone. Through a half-open door on the lower storey, he caught a glimpse of a haggard face lighted up by wolfish eyes, and heard a savage, growling voice. He felt that both eyes and voice cursed him as he passed; and afterwards, recalling these things vaguely, as one does the incidents of a hideous dream, he knew that, for the second time, he had seen Cyril Brandon. Guy could hardly tell how he reached London that night, for the brain fever was coming on, that, the next morning, held him in its clutches fast.

CHAPTER XXIX.

Quanto minus est cum reliquis versari, quam tui meminisse.

The tidings of her son's illness reached Lady Catherine quickly, at Kerton Manor. I did not hear of it till a day later; and when I arrived I found her nearly exhausted by sleeplessness and anxiety, though she had not been Guy's nurse for more than thirty-six hours.

The sick-bed of delirium taxes the energies of the watcher very differently from any other. There is a sort of fascination in the roll of the restless head, tossing from side to side, as if trying to escape from the pressure of a heavy hot hand; in the glare of the eager eyes that follow you everywhere, with a question in them that they never wait to have answered; in the incoherent words, just trembling on the verge of a revelation, but always leaving the tale half told —that creates a perpetual strain on the attention, enough to wear out a strong man.

There have been men, they say, who, sensible of the approach of delirium, chose the one person who should attend them, and ordered their doors to be closed against all others, preferring to die almost alone to the risk of what their ravings might betray. But I have heard, also, that there are secrets—secrets shared, too, by many confederates—to which neither fever nor intoxication ever gave a clue. The hot blood grew chill for an instant, and the babbling tongue was tied, when the dreamer came near the frontier-ground, where the Oath reared itself distinct and threatening as ever, while all else was fantastic and vague.

There was something of this in Guy's case. We could hear distinctly many of his broken sentences, relating sometimes to the hunting-field, sometimes to the orgies of wine or play. There were names, too, occurring now and then, which to his mother were meaningless, but to me had an evil significance. Once or twice—not oftener—he was talking to Flora Bellasys. But when the name of Constance Brandon came, the harsh loud voice sank into a whisper so low that if you had laid your ear to his lips you would not have caught one syllable. Very, very often I had occasion to remark this, and to wonder how the heart could guard its treasure so rigidly, when the brain was driving on, aimless as a ship before the hurricane with her rudder gone.

On the fifth day after Guy's illness began, an angel might have interceded for him in the stead of a pure true-hearted woman; for Constance was dead.

I saw Lady Catherine tremble, and bend her head down low, when she heard the news, as if herself crushed by the blow which would fall so heavily on her son. She had known but very little of Constance: that little had made her love her dearly—who could help doing that? Yet it was not Constance she was regretting then. I could see the same thought was in her mind as in mine—who will tell Guy this if he recovers? I did all I could to spare her; but the anxiety she felt when out of the sick-room tried her almost more than the bodily fatigue. It was best to let her have her way. I never guessed, till then, the extent of a weak woman's endurance.

It was a close struggle, indeed, between life and death. The fire of the fever died out, when there was little left for it to feed on. The arm which, a month ago, was fatal as old Front-de-bœuf's, had not strength enough in its loosened sinews to lift itself three inches from the coverlet.

Guy had fallen at last into a heavy sleep. The doctors said it was the turning-point. If he woke quite calm and sane, the immense power of his constitution would probably enable him to rally; if not, the worst that could be feared was certain.

He woke after many hours. There was such a stillness in the room as he unclosed his eyes, that you might have heard his mother's heart beat as she sat motionless by his bedside. They recognized her at once—heavy and dim as they were—for he tried to turn his head to kiss her hand that lay on the pillow beside him. Then we knew that he was saved; and I saw, for the first time, tears stream down Lady Catherine's worn cheeks. She could check the evidence of her grief better than that of her joy.

He saw me, too, as I came forward out of the shadow. 'Is that you, Frank?' he said, faintly. 'How very good of you to come!' We could not let him speak any more.

On the third day after the change for the better, I was alone with the invalid. He turned to me suddenly, and spoke in a low voice, but so steady that it surprised me. 'Frank, what have you heard of Constance?'

Had I been arming myself to meet that question—disciplining my voice and countenance for days—only to fail so miserably at last? I felt unspeakably angry and self-reproachful, when I saw that my face had told him all.

'When did she die?' he went on in the same measured tone, without taking his eyes off me. I think he had nerved himself just enough for the effort, and was afraid of breaking down if he paused.

I could speak now, and told him. I was going on to tell him, too, how calmly and happily her life had ended (her aunt had written all this to Lady Catherine), when Guy stopped me—not coldly, but with a hopeless sadness in his accent very painful to hear.

'Thank you, it is meant kindly; but I would rather not speak of this, even to you—at least for some time.'

His self-command carried him through bravely, but it only just lasted out. Then he turned his head aside, and threw his arm across it. As I drew back to the window, I saw the quivering of the long emaciated fingers that veiled his face. I did not look again till Guy's voice called to me, quite composedly; for I did not dare to pry into or meddle with the secrets of the strong heart that knew its own bitterness so well.

I told Lady Catherine what had passed. She was very much relieved to hear that it was all over. She never opened her lips on the subject to her son: indeed, though those two understood each other thoroughly, there were wonderfully few confidences between them.

Guy's convalescence was slow—far slower than we had hoped for. It seemed as if some spring was broken in his being, not easily to be replaced. He was moody and listless always, speaking very seldom; but his words and manner, when he did talk, were gentler and more kindly than I ever remembered them.

One of his first visitors was Colonel Mohun. He had been incessant in his inquiries, and had offered to share our watching; but Lady Catherine would not hear of it. She had a sort of dread at the idea of that grim face lowering over the sick man's bed.

No one was present at their first interview. Ralph was more moved than he cared to show at his old friend's altered looks and ways; but he gave him the account of his search after the lost letter conscientiously, without sparing a single detail. 'It must have gone hard with Guy,' he remarked to me, thoughtfully, as he came away. 'He's very far from right yet. When I told him what Willis had done, I made sure he would be very angry. He only said "Poor wretch! he acted under orders, and did not know what mischief he was doing." He wants rousing; but I am sure I don't know what is to do it.'

Forgiveness and forgetfulness of injuries seemed to that hard old heathen the most dangerous sign of bodily and mental debility.

He came almost daily after that; and I think his rough ways and sharp sarcastic remarks acted on Livingstone as a sort of tonic—bitter, but strengthening.

A few days later Mrs Vavasour called. She, too, saw Guy alone. She surely had a message to deliver, or she would not have ventured on an interview which must have been so painful to both. It did not last long; but when she came down, her thick black veil was drawn closely over her face; and that evening Guy was denied to Ralph Mohun.

One afternoon Livingstone was quite by himself. The Colonel had gone into Warwickshire for a few days' hunting; Lady Catherine had paid her usual visit and had gone back to her hotel, and I was out for an hour or two. We did not mind leaving him a good deal alone; indeed, he preferred it very often, and said so.

His servant came in, looking rather puzzled, to say that a lady wished to see him. She would not give her name, but said that she would not detain him many minutes.

Guy had not time to refuse admittance to the visitor, she followed so close upon her message. Though she was closely wrapped in her mantle, and her veil fell in triple folds, there was no mistaking the turn of the haughty head, the smooth elastic step, and the lithe undulations of a figure matchless between the four seas. No wonder that he drew his breath hard as he recognized Flora Bellasys.

CHAPTER XXX.

Treu und fest.

As the door closed, Flora advanced quickly. 'Confess you are surprised to see me,' she said, holding out her little gloved hand. The courtesy towards the sex, which was hereditary with the Livingstones, contrasting strangely with their fierce, ungovernable tempers, made him not reject it; but his lay passive and nerveless in her slender fingers, never answering their eager pressure; it had no longer the elastic quiver of repressed strength that she remembered and liked so well.

'I am surprised to see you here, and so soon,' he answered, coldly: 'but I knew we should meet before long.'

'The surprise does not seem too charming,' Miss Bellasys said, pouting her scarlet lip, as she threw herself into a deep *bergère* opposite to the couch on which Livingstone had already sunk down again—he was very weak and unsteady in his movements still.

Was it by chance or calculation that a fold of her dress disarranged displayed the slender foot with its arched instep—set off by the delicate *brodequin*, a labour of love to the Parisian Crispin—and the straight, beautifully-turned ankle, cased in dead-white silk? The latter, I think; for Flora knew how to fall as well as Cæsar or Polyxena, and had studied her part to its minutest shade. It was by the senses that she had always been most successful in attacking Guy, and she knew that, in old days, no point of feminine perfection had a greater attraction for him.

The temptation, if so it was intended, had about as much effect upon him now, as it might have had on weather-beaten St Simeon Stylites when his penances had lasted twenty years.

After a minute's silence, during which Flora was gazing intently on her companion, leaning her chin upon her hand, she spoke again:

'I fear you must have been very ill. How—how changed you are!'

Livingstone was, indeed, fearfully altered. The healthy brown of his complexion had given place to a dull, opaque pallor; there were great hollows under the prominent cheek-bones, and his loose dressing-robe of black velvet hung straight down from the gaunt angles of the immense joints and bones. His voice sounded deeper than ever, as he replied:—

'Yes, I have been very ill, and I am utterly changed. But you must have had something more important to say to me, or you would hardly have ventured on this step.'

She was getting very nervous—inexplicably so for her, who generally kept her head, while she made others lose theirs.

'No. I only wished—' she hesitated, trying to force a smile, and then broke off suddenly—'Guy, do speak kindly to me. Don't look at me so strangely.'

His answer came, brief and stern.

'I will speak, then. Miss Bellasys, on what authority from me did you venture to interfere in my concerns so far as to intercept my correspondence?'

She tried denial still; it was her way; she always *would* do it, even when it could avail nothing—perhaps to gain time.

'I don't know what you mean. I never—'

Livingstone interrupted her, with a curl of contempt on his lip.

'Stop, I beg of you. It is useless to stoop lower than you have done already. I have Willis's written confession here. Ah! I know your talents too well to accuse you without material proof.'

She raised her head, haughtily enough now. There was something Spartan about that girl. She had such an utter recklessness of exposure—it was in failure that she felt the shame.

'At least *you* ought not to reproach me. You might guess my motive—my only one—without forcing me to confess it. Have I not gratified your pride enough already?'

'You know that is not the question?' Guy answered, gravely. 'Yet you are half right. I could not reproach you for any fair, honest move. In much I own myself more guilty than you. But this is very different. Miss Bellasys, you must have distrusted greatly your own powers of fascination before you stooped to such cruel treachery.'

'I did not know what I was doing,' she whispered, 'I did not know she was dying. Ah, Guy!—have pity.'

'But you knew it might kill her, to find her letter—such a letter—unanswered. You knew what she must have suffered before she wrote it. You did all this in cold blood, and now you say to me, "have pity!" If an accountable being—not a woman and her miserable instrument—had wronged me so, I would have risked my soul to have revenge; and, because that is impossible, you think I feel less bitterly? You might have known me better by this time.'

Instead of being softened by her appeal, his heart, features, and tone were hardening more and more.

The sting of defeat, imminent and unavoidable, that, ere this, has driven strong and wise men headlong into the thickest of the battle to hunt for death there, proved too much for a temper never well regulated.

'You have decided, then?' she cried, passionately, her eyes flashing and her lip quivering. 'After all I have risked and borne for you, I am to be sacrificed to a shadow—a memory—the memory of that cold, pale statue of propriety?' She checked herself suddenly, only just in time.

Guy had sprung to his feet, excitement bringing back for the moment all his lost strength. If Ralph Mohun had seen him, he would not have feared that the wrathful devil was cast out. It was raging within him then, untamed and dangerous as ever.

'Do you dare to insult her now that she is dead—and to me, not a month after I have lost her? It is not safe—take care, take care!'

The tempest of his passion made him forget, for the first time in his life, the weakness of her who had roused it.

Flora was only a woman after all, though haughty and bold of spirit as any that had breathed. Her own outbreak of anger vanished before that terrible burst of wrath, just as the camp-fire, when the prairie is blazing, is swallowed up in the great roaring torrent of flame. She bowed her head on her hands, trembling all over in pure physical fear. Guy felt ashamed when he saw the effect of his violence, and spoke more gently than he had done yet.

'Forgive me. I was very wrong; but I have not learnt to control myself—I never shall, I fear; but you ought not to say such words, even if I could bear them better. Now, it is time that we should part; you have stayed here too long already. You must not risk your reputation for me, who cannot even be grateful for the venture. We shall never meet again, if I can avoid it; it would be strange to do so as mere acquaintance, and in any other way—no, don't stop me—it is impossible. It will be long before I go much into society again, so I shall not cross your path.'

Flora knew it was hopeless then. She was quite broken down, and did not raise her head from her hand, through the fingers of which, half shading her face, the tears trickled fast. Guy heard her murmur, very low and plaintively—'I have loved you so long—so dearly!'

Mistress as she was of every art that can deceive, I believe she only spoke the simple truth then. With all the energy of her strong sensual nature, I believe she did worship Livingstone. To most men she would have been far more dangerous thus, in the abandonment of her sorrow, than ever she had been in the insolence of her splendid beauty.

There are some women, very few (Johnson's fair friend, Sophy Streatfield, was one), whom weeping does not disfigure. Their eyelids do not get red or swollen, only the iris softens for a moment; and the drops do not streak or blot the polished cheeks, but glitter there, singly, like dew on marble; their sobs are well regulated, and follow in a certain rhythm; and the heaving bosom sinks and swells, not too stormily. It is a rare accomplishment. Miss Bellasys had not practised it often, being essentially Democritian—not to say Rabelaisian—in her philosophy; but she did it very well. Like every other emotion, it became her.

Guy hardly glanced at her, and never answered a word.

She rose to go; then turned all at once to try one effort more. 'Yes, we must part,' she said. 'I know it now. But give me a kind word to take with me. I shall be so lonely, now that you are my enemy. Will you not say you wish me well? Ah, Guy! remember all the hours that I have tried to make pleasant for you. Say "good-bye, Flora," only those two little words, gently.' Her voice was broken and uncertain, but full of music still, like the wind wandering through an organ.

Just at that moment I opened the door. (I had not an idea Livingstone was not alone.) I closed it before either had remarked my entrance, but not before I had caught sight of a very striking picture.

Guy was leaning one arm against the mantelpiece; the other was crossed over his chest: on that arm Flora was clinging, with both her hands clenched in the passion of her appeal. Her slight bonnet had fallen rather back, showing the masses of her glorious hair, and all her flushed cheeks, and her eyes that shone with a strange lustre, though there were tears still on their long trailing lashes. I saw the impersonation of material life, exuberant and vigorous, yet delicately lovely—the Lust of the Eye incarnate.

He stood perfectly still, making no effort to cast her off. Had he done so with violence, it would scarcely have evinced more repulsion than did the expression of his face. There was no more of yielding or softening in the set features and severe eyes than you would find in those of a corpse three hours old, whose spirit has passed in some great anger or pain. Can you guess what made him more than ever hard and unrelenting? He was thinking *who* tried to win a kind farewell from him six months ago, and utterly failed. Should her rival have this triumph, too, over the dead ?

As he answered deliberately, each slow word shut out another hope, like bolts shot, one by one, in the lock of a prison-door.

'I remember nothing of the past except your last act, for which I will never, never forgive you. I form no wish for your welfare or for the reverse. There shall not stand the faintest shadow of a connecting link that I can break asunder. Between you and me there is the gulf of a fresh-made grave; and no thought of mine shall ever cross it—so help me God in heaven!'

Flora's last arrow was shivered: if she had had another in her quiver she would have had no courage to try it, after hearing those terrible words. She caught his hand, however, before he could guess her intention, and pressed her lips upon it, till they left their print behind; and then she was gone. Her light foot hardly sounded as it sprang down the stairs, but its faint echo was the last living sound connected with Flora Bellasys that ever reached the ear of Guy Livingstone.

When I heard more of the interview, I thought, and think still, that he erred on the side of harshness. He was so fixed and steady in his purpose, that he could have afforded to have compromised a little in expressing it. But he did things in his own way, and fought with his own weapons—effective, but hardly to be wielded by most men, like the axe of the King-maker or the bow of Odysseus. In carrying out his will, he was apt to consider the softer feelings of others as little as he did his own. It was just so with him, when riding to hounds: he went as straight as a line, and if he did not spare his horses, he certainly did not himself.

To each man alive, one particular precept of the Christian code is harder to realize and practise than all the rest put together. It was this, perhaps, which drove the Anchorites on from one degree of penance to another, and made them so savage in self-tormenting. When the macerated flesh had almost lost sensation, the thorn that had galled it sometimes in their hot youth rankled incessantly, more venomous than ever. That one injunction—'Forgive, as you would hope to be forgiven'—was ever a stumbling-block to Guy.

Besides all this, he knew, better than any one, what sort of an adversary he was contending against; one with whom each step in negotiation or temporizing was a step towards discomfiture. It was like the Spaniard with his *navaja* against the sabre: your only chance is, keeping him steadily at the sword's-point, without breaking ground; if he once gets under your guard, not all the saints in the calendar can save you.

Perhaps, then, he was right after all. Certainly, Ralph Mohun thought so, as he listened to a sketch of the proceedings with a grim satisfaction edifying to witness.

As for me, before I went to bed that night, I read through those chapters in the 'Mort d'Arthur' that tell how the long guilty loves of Launcelot and Guenever ended. In the present case, there was certainly wonderfully little penitence on the lady's side; but yet there were points of resemblance which struck me. (I always think the Queen must have been the image of Flora.) It is worth while wading through many chapters of exaggeration and obscurity to come out into the light of the noble epilogue at last.

Good King Arthur is gone. It bit deep, that blow which Mordred the strong traitor struck when the spear stood out a fathom behind his back: and Morgan la Fay came too late to heal the grievous wound that had taken cold. The frank, kind, generous heart that would not mistrust till certainty left no place for suspicion, can never be wrung or betrayed again. The bitter parting between the lovers is over too; and Launcelot is gone to his own place, without the farewell caress he prayed for when he besought the Queen 'to kiss him once and never more.' After a very few short months the beautiful wild bird has beaten herself to death against her cage, and the vision comes by night, bidding Launcelot arise and fetch the corpse of Guenever home. She wandered often and far in life; but where should her home be *now*, but by the side of her husband? Hardly and painfully in two days, he and the faithful Seven accomplish the thirty miles that lay between; so utterly is that unearthly strength, before which lance-shafts were as reeds, and iron-bars as silken threads (remember the May night in Meliagraunce's castle), enfeebled and broken down. He stands in the nunnery-church at Almesbury; he hears from the Queen's maidens of the prayer that was ever on her lips through those two days when she lay a-dying, how 'she besought God that she might never have power to see Sir Launcelot with her worldly eyes.' Then, says the chronicler, 'he saw her visage; yet he wept not greatly, but sighed. And so he did all the observance of the service himself, both the dirge at night and the mass on the morrow.' Not till every rite was performed, not till the earth had closed over the marble coffin, did Launcelot swoon.

I know nothing in fiction so piteous as the words that tell of his dreary, mortal sorrow. 'Then, Sir

Launcelot never after eat but little meat, nor drank, but continually mourned until he was dead ; and then he sickened more and more, and dried and dwined away ; for the bishop nor none of his fellows might make him to eat, and little he drank; so that he waxed shorter by a cubit than he was, and the people could not know him; for evermore day and night he prayed; but needfully as nature required sometimes he slumbered a broken sleep ; and always he was lying grovelling on King Arthur's and Queen Guenever's tomb. And there was no comfort that his fellows could make him ; it availed nothing.'

We know that it cannot last long ; we know that the morning is fast approaching, when they will find him 'stark dead, and lying as he had smiled ; ' when they will bear him forth, according to his vow, to his resting-place in Joyous Guard ; when there will be pronounced over him that famous funeral oration—the truest, the simplest, the noblest, I think, that ever was spoken over the body of a sinful man.

CHAPTER XXXI.

I pray God pardon me,
That I no more, without a pang,
His choicest works can see.

It was long before Livingstone's health recovered the check to its improvement given by that interview. However, as the spring advanced he began to regain strength rapidly; and towards the end of May he and I started in the *Petrel*, which he had just bought, for a cruise in the Mediterranean.

It would seem hard that any one, coasting for the first time along the shores of Italy, and penetrating ever and anon far into the interior, should not feel and display some interest in the succession of pictures, of living Nature and dead Art, that meet you at every step. I cannot say that I ever detected the faintest symptom of such in my companion. He strayed with me through the old Forum, and through Adrian's villa, and lingered by the Alban lake; but it was more to keep me in countenance than anything else. I liked them better this second time of seeing them than I did the first; I doubt if they left an impression on his mind equal to the dimmest photograph that ever was the pride of an amateur and the puzzle of his friends. The brilliant landscapes made up of bold headlands, hanging woods, and sunny bays, fared no better. Guy did not come on deck for two hours after we cast anchor off Mola di Gaeta.

Our *ciceroni* were much pained and scandalized at an indifference which exceeded all that they had yet encountered in the matter-of-fact *Signori Inglesi.* I saw one of them look quite relieved, when, after quitting us, he had to listen to an excitable young Jewess endeavouring to express her raptures in the most execrable Italian. The physical effort it cost her was awful to witness, especially as she was wintering in Italy for her lungs. O, long-suffering stones of the Coliseum! which returned the most barbarous echo—the growls from the cells when their tenants scented the Christian; the jargon of the Goth and the Hun; or the *lingua Anglo-Romana in bocca Bloomsburiana?* The two first-named classes at all events confined themselves to their own dialect, and spoke it, doubtless, with perfect propriety. However, in the present instance, the *custode* took the sentimental ebullition of the Maid of Judah as an *amende honorable,* and rubbed his key complacently.

I do not believe that our travels brought to Guy a single distraction to the great sorrow that all the while held him fast.

A German philosopher under similar circumstances would have written reams and spoken volumes (eating and drinking all the while Pantagruelically), theorizing and abstracting his emotions till they vanished into cloud and vapour. A true disciple of Rousseau or Lamartine would have analyzed his grief, dividing it into as many channels as Alexander did the Oxus, till the main-stream was lost, and each individual rivulet might be crossed dry-shod. Both would have shed tears perpetual and profuse. I read the other day of a Frenchman who, in the midst of a mixed assembly remembering that on that day ten years he had lost a dear friend, instantly went out and wept bitterly. He was so charmed with the happiness of the thought that, as he says, 'I took the resolution henceforth to weep for all whom I have loved, each on the anniversary of their death.'

Can you conceive anything more touching than the picture of the Bereaved One consulting his almanack and then 'going at it with a will?' It *was* an athletic performance, certainly; but remember what condition he must have been in from the constant training.

From the episode of Niobe down to the best song in the 'Princess,' how many beautiful lines have been devoted to those outward and visible signs of sorrow!

Sadder elegiacs, more pathetic threnodies might have been written on the tears that were stifled at their source, either from pride or from physical inability to let them flow. Great regrets, like great schemes, are generally matured in the shade. If I had to choose the tombs where most hopes and affections are buried, I should turn, I think, not to those with the long inscriptions of questionable poetry or blameless Latinity, but to where just the initials and a cross are cut on the single stone.

The philosophical and poetical mourners hardly suffered much more than Guy did during those months, and for long after too, though he was always quite silent on the subject, and would speak cheerfully on others, now and then; and though, from the day that he parted with Constance to that of his own death, his eyes were as dry as the skies over the Delta. He used to lie for hours in that state of utter listlessness which gives a reality to the sad old Eastern proverb, 'Man is better sitting than standing, lying down than sitting, dead than lying down.'

With all this, however, his health improved every day. After the wild life he had led lately, the perfect rest, and the clear pure air, refreshed him marvellously. It had the effect of coming out of a room heated and laden with smoke into the cool summer morning. His strength, too, had returned almost completely. I found this out at Baiæ.

The guardian of the *Cento Camerelle,* a big *lazzarone,* became inordinately abusive. My impression is that he had received about fifteen times his due; but seeing our yacht in the offing, he conceived the idea that we were princes in our own country, and ought to be robbed in his proportionally. Guy's eyes began to gleam at last, and he made a step towards the offender. I thought he was going to be heavily visited; but Livingstone only lifted him by the throat and held him suspended against the wall, as you may see the children in those parts pin the lizards in a forked stick. Then he let him drop, unhurt, but green with terror. A year ago, a straightforward blow from the shoulder would have settled the business in a shorter time, and worked a strange alteration in good Giuseppe's handsome sunburnt face. But the old hardness of heart was wearing away. I had another proof of this some days later.

We were dropping down out of the Bay of Naples. Though we weighed anchor in early morning, it was past noon before we cleared the Bocca di Capri, for there was hardly wind enough to give the *Petrel* steerage-way. The smoke from our long Turkish pipes mounted almost straight upwards, and lingered over our heads in thin blue curls; yet the sullen, discontented heave and roll in the water were growing heavier every hour. The black tufa cliffs crested with shattered masonry—the foundations of the sty where the Boar of Capreæ wallowed—were just on our starboard quarter, when Riddell, the master, came up to Livingstone. 'I think we'd better make all snug, sir,' he said. 'There's dirty weather to windward, and we haven't too much sea-room.' He was an old man-of-war's boatswain, and had had a tussle, in his time, on every sea and ocean in the known world, with every wind that blows. He had rather a contempt for the Mediterranean, esteeming it just one degree above the Cowes Roads, and attaching about as much importance to its vagaries as one might do to the fractiousness of a spoilt child. If he had been caught in the most terrible tempest that ever desolated the shores of the Great Lake, I don't believe he would have called it anything but 'dirty weather.' He was too good a sailor, though, not to take all precautions, even if he had been sailing on a piece of ornamental water: and he went quickly forward to give the necessary orders, after getting a nod of assent from Guy.

The latter raised himself lazily on his arm, so as to see all round over the lower bulwarks. There was a blue-black bank of cloud rolling up from the S. W. Puffs of wind, with no coolness in them, but dry and uncertain as if stirred by some capricious artificial means, struck the sails without filling them, and drove the *Petrel* through the water by fits and starts.

'I really believe we are going to have a white squall,' Guy remarked indifferently. 'Well! we shall see how the boat behaves. Riddell only spoke just in time.'

Suddenly his tone changed, and he said, quickly and decidedly, 'Hold on everything!'

The master turned his weatherwise eye towards the quarter where the danger lay, and frowned. 'We're none too soon with it, Mr Livingstone. If there's a yard too much canvas spread when *that* reaches us, I won't answer for the spars.'

Deeper and deeper the blackness came rushing down upon us, an angry ridge of foam before it—the white squall showing its teeth.

Guy took the old man by the arm, and pointed to an object to leeward that none on board had remarked yet. It was a small *barca* with four men in it. They were Capriotes, as we found afterwards, the boldest boatmen in the Bay. Had they been pure-bred Neapolitans, they would have been down on their faces long ago, screaming out prayers to a long muster-roll of Saints. As it was, they stood manfully to their oars, straining every muscle to reach us; there was no other safety for them then. 'They will never get alongside in time, unless we bear down to meet them,' Livingstone said, 'and what chance will they have in ten minutes hence?'

Riddell was only half satisfied. His creed evidently was, that a sailor's first duty is to his own ship; but neither he nor any one else ever argued with Guy. 'As you like, sir,' he grumbled, somewhat discontentedly. 'Keep her full, Saunders; we shall fetch them so.'

If a stitch of sail had been taken off our vessel she could never have reached the *barca*, though her crew strove hard to meet us. She forged down slowly enough as it was, but we were just in time to take them on board.

'Reef everything now!' Riddell shouted, leaping himself first into the rigging, like a wild cat. 'Cheerily men—with a will!' All his ill-humour was gone when the peril became imminent.

We were strong-handed, and the four Capriotes did us seamen's service: but it was 'touch and go.' The last man had scarcely reached the deck when the line of foam was within half-cable's length. Then there came a sound unlike any I had ever heard before in the elements, beginning with a whistling sort of scream and deepening into a roar as of many angry voices, bestial and human, striving for the mastery; and then the *Petrel* staggered and reeled over almost on her beam-ends, in the midst of a white boiling caldron of mad water. She recovered herself, however, quickly, quivering and trembling as a live creature might do after severe punishment; and we drove on, the strong arms at the wheel keeping her well before the blast. In a very few minutes, I suppose (though it seemed very long), I heard old Riddell say, 'Sharp while it lasted, Mr Livingstone; but they're right to call it a squall. They've nothing down here-away like a good right-down hard gale.'

I looked up, clearing my eyes blinded with the hissing spray, just as Guy answered, coolly as ever. He had run his arm through a becket, and did not seem to have moved otherwise; whereas I disgraced myself by falling at full length as the squall struck us.

'Ah, you've got difficult to please; it's always so when one sees so much of life. Never mind, Riddell, the Mediterranean does its best, and perhaps we'll go and try your tornadoes some day. Where's the *barca* now?'

Where? The eyes that could have told you that must have looked a hundred fathoms deep. There was not the faintest vestige of such a thing to be seen; not even a shivered plank. The poor Capriotes' 'bread-winner' had gone the way of Antonio's argosies—another whet to the all-devouring appetite, for which nothing that swims is too large or too small.

It was almost calm again when we landed the rescued men at Salerno; we were glad to get rid of them, for their gratitude was overpowering, especially as all the salt-water that had soaked them could not disguise the savour of their favourite herb.

You may break, you may ruin the clay if you will, but the scent of the garlic will cling to it still.

Guy gave them enough to buy two such boats as they had lost—about as much as one wins or loses in an evening's whist, with fair luck and half-crown points.

This incident showed the change that was coming over my companion. His principle had always been that, a man who could not help himself was not worth helping. He never asked for aid himself, and never gave it to his own sex, as a rule. I believe his rescuing me at B—— was a solitary case, and I took it as a great compliment. You will say this one was only an act of common humanity. If you had known the man, you would have thought, as I did, that the words of her, who was an angel then, were bearing fruit already.

Nothing happened of the slightest interest as we ran down through the Straits of Messina, and up the eastern coast of Calabria. We did not stay to see Sicily then, for we had settled to be in Venice by a certain day, to meet the Forresters.

If I were to be seduced into 'word-painting,' the Queen of the Adriatic would tempt me. I know no other scene so provocative of enthusiasm as the square acre round St Mark's. All things considered, the author of the 'Stones of Venice' seems very sufficiently rational and cold-blooded.

We cannot all be romantic about landscapes. Nature has worshippers enough not to grudge a few to Art. For myself, admiring both when in perfection, I prefer hewn stones to rough rocks—the Canalazzo to *any* cascade. The glory of old days that clings round the Palace of the Doges stands comparison, in my mind's eye, with the Iris of Terni.

But why trench on a field already amply cultivated? I will never describe any place till I find a virgin spot untouched by Murray, and then I will send it to him, with my initials. Does such exist in Europe? 'Faith, very hardly, sir.' *Nil intentatum reliquit.* What obligations do we not owe to the accomplished compilers? Rarely rising into poetry (I except 'Spain,' —the field, and bar one), never jocose, they move on, severe in simplicity, straight to their solemn end of enlightening the British Tourist. Upright as Rhadamanthus, they hold the scales that weigh the merits of cathedrals, hotels, ruins, guides, pictures, and mountain-passes, telling us what to eat, drink, and avoid. Let us repose on them in blind but contented reliance.

I heard of one man, clever but eccentric, who became so exasperated at seeing the volumes in everybody's hand, and hearing them in everybody's mouth, that he conceived a sort of personal enmity to them, impiously dissenting from their conclusions and questioning their premises. The well-known red cover at last had the same effect on him as the scarlet cloak on the bull in the *corrida*, making him stamp and roar hideously. The angry gods had demented him. *Vœ misero!* How could such sacrilege end but badly? Braving and deriding the solemn warning of the Prophet, he attempted a certain pass in the Tyrol alone, and losing his way, caught a pleurisy which proved fatal. He died game, but, I am sorry to say, impenitent, speaking blasphemy against The Book, with his last breath. *Discite justitiam, moniti, et non temnere—*.

Such heresy, be it far from me! If I had my will, I protest I would found a 'Murray's Travelling Fellowship' in one or both of the Universities. If I had the poetic vein, I would indite a pendant to Byron's Iambics to that enlightened bibliopole. He published 'Childe Harold,' and the Handbook to Everywhere. Could one man in one century do more for the Ideal and the Real.

CHAPTER XXXII.

Sweetest lips that ever were kissed,
  Brightest eyes that ever have shone,
May sigh and whisper, and *he* not list,
Or look away, and never be missed
  Long or ever a month be gone.

It was a very curious *ménage* that of the Forresters. They were wonderfully happy, yet you could not call theirs *domestic* felicity. They went out perpetually everywhere, and were scarcely ever alone together at home. The cold-water cure of matrimony had not been able to cool either down into the dignity and steadiness befitting that honourable state. As far as I could see, Charley flirted as much as ever; the only difference was, that he stole upon his victims now with a sort of protecting and paternal air, merging gradually, as the interest deepened, into the old confidential style. The whole effect was, if anything, more seductive than before.

The fair Venetians admired him intensely. His bright, clear complexion and rich chestnut hair had the charm of novelty for them. Though without the faintest respect for grammar or idiom, he spoke their language with perfect composure, confidence, and self-satisfaction; and his tones were so well adapted to the slow, soft, languid tongue, that his blunders sounded better than other men's correctness of speech. *Mallem mehercule cum Platone errare.* When he said, '*Si Siora,*' it seemed as if he were calling the lady by a pet-name.

Isabel did a good deal of mischief too in her unassuming way; but I think she confined her depredations chiefly to her compatriots.

The best of it was, that neither objected in the least to the other's proceedings, appearing, indeed, to consider them rather creditable than otherwise. Perhaps it would be as well if this principle of reciprocal free-agency were somewhat extended, though not quite to the latitude to which they carried it.

We cannot send our wives about surrounded by a detachment of semiviri to keep the peace; our climate is too uncertain, and influenza too prevalent, for us to watch their windows ourselves, as they do at Cadiz. Fancy mounting guard in Eaton Square, at four p.m., shrouded in a yellow fog, on the chance of surprising a forbidden morning-visitor!

Supposing that we could adopt either of those methods, why should they prove more efficacious than they are said to be on their native soil? If the British husband will allow nothing for the principles, charitably supposed by others to be inherent in the wife of his bosom—nothing for the Damoclean damages hanging over the imaginary plotter against his peace—why should he depreciate his own merits and powers so completely as to consider himself out of the lists altogether? If he would only desist from making himself consistently disagreeable, I believe, in most cases, his substantial interest would be little endangered.

That poor Hephæstus! The net was an ingenious device, and a pretty piece of workmanship, but—it didn't answer.

In despite of Mrs Ellis, there are women whose mission it is *not* to be good housewives; they can't be useful if they would, any more than May-flies can spin silk. Like them, they can attract fish (and sometimes get snapped up if they go too close), that's all. If you marry them, you must accept them as they are, and take your chance. Be generous, then, and don't stop their waltzing. I believe there may be flirting without the most distant idea of criminality—fencing with wooden foils, where no blood is drawn.

A lady was asked the other day, 'what she did when an admirer became too lover-like?' Her answer was—'I never had such a case.' I think she spoke the truth; yet she was a coquette renowned through a good part of two hemispheres.

As for the doubts and fears of the other sex, the subject is too vast for me. To the end of time there will be Deianiras (with imaginary Ioles), Zaras, and Mrs Caudles. Tragedy and comedy have tried in vain to frighten or to laugh them out of the indulgence of the fatal passion that wreaks itself indiscriminately on the best and the worst, the youngest and the oldest, the simplest and the most guileful of adult males. Let us not attempt to argue then; but, wrapping ourselves in our virtue, endure as best we may the groundless reproaches and accusations of our ox-eyed Junos.

We *did* Venice very severely, with the exception of Forrester, who, after strolling once through the Palace of the Doges (a pilgrimage interrupted by many halts and profuse lamentations), declined seeing anything more than what he could view from his gondola. I never saw any one so completely at home in that most delicious of conveyances. His Venetian friends encouraged and sympathized with him in his laziness, and pitied him with eyes and words, for ever being teased about it. Indeed he was generally left alone; but one day we were landing to see a church of great repute, and Miss Devereux made a strong appeal to him to follow her. She was a handsome clever girl, a great favourite of Charley's. I believe they used to quarrel and make it up again about six times in every twenty-four hours. We saw that it was hopeless; but she was obstinate enough to try and persuade him.

'Now, Captain Forrester, you must come. I have set my heart upon it.'

He lifted his long eyelashes in a languid satisfaction. 'Thank you very much; I like people to be interested about me; but you see it's simply impossible. Look at Rinaldo; there's a sensible example for you. He doesn't mean to stir till he is obliged to do so.' The handsome gondolier had already couched, to enjoy a bask in the sun, which was blazing fiercely down on his brown face and magnificent black hair.

'There is the most perfect Titian,' she persisted.

'No use. I should not appreciate it,' he replied. 'I have been through a gallery *with you* before. It's a delusion and a snare. I never looked at a single picture. The canvas won't stand the comparison.'

'I did not think you would have refused me,' Miss Devereux went on, 'particularly after last night, when you were so very—amusing.' She hesitated out the last word with a blush. It evidently was not the adjective that ought to have closed the sentence.

'Amusing!' replied Charley, plaintively. 'You need not say any more. I am crushed for the day. I meant to be especially touching and pathetic. Well, there's some good in everything, though. I entertained an angel unawares.'

'I shall know how far to believe you another time, at all events,' she retorted, getting rather provoked.

'Don't be unjust,' said Forrester, profoundly regardless of the fact that his wife was within three paces of them. 'I said I was ready to die for you. So I am.

You may fix the time; but I may choose the place. If you insist upon it, I'll make an end of it now—here.' And he settled himself deeper into the pile of cushions.

We had no patience to listen to any more, but went off to perform our duty. Long before he had exhausted his arguments against moving, we had returned. Margaret Devereux missed seeing the church and its Titian, but she got a 'great moral lesson.' She never wasted her pretty pleadings in such a hopeless cause again.

I remember when we mounted the Campanile the solemn way in which he wished us *buon viaggio.* When we reached the top, we made out his figure reclining on many chairs in front of 'Florian's.'

He saw us, too, and lifted the glass before him to his lips with a wave of approval and encouragement, just as they do at Chamounix when the telescopes make out a few black specks on the white crests of the mountain. When we came down, he stopped us before we could say one word. 'Yes, I know—it was magnificent. Bella, I see you are going to rave about the view. If you do, I'll shut you up for a week *en pénitence,* and feed you on nothing but "Bradshaw" and water.'

We spent a very pleasant month in Venice. It did Guy good, being with the Forresters. He had always been very fond of his cousin, and she seemed to suit him better than any else now. She would sit by him for hours, talking in her low caressing tones that soothed him like a cool soft hand laid on a forehead fever-heated. Isabel was not afraid of him now; but a great awe mingled with her pity.

It is curious, and tells well perhaps for our human nature; neither pride of birth, nor complete success, nor profound wisdom, surrounds a man with such reverence as the being possessed with a great sorrow. At least none can envy him; and so those who were his enemies once—like the gallant Frenchman when he saw his adversary's empty sleeve—bring their swords to the salute and pass on.

At last we started for Rome, our party nearly filling two carriages. There are only two ways of travelling: in your own carriage, with courier and fourgon, like a Russian or transatlantic noble; or in vetturino. This last mode, which was ours, is scarcely less pleasant, if you are not in a hurry. The charm of having, for a certain period, every care as to ways and means off your mind, compensates for the six-miles-an-hour pace. So we moved slowly southward, through Verona—where one thinks more of the Avon than the Adige—where, in tombs poised like Mahomet's coffin, the mighty Scagliari sleep between earth and heaven, as if not quite fit for either—where are the cypresses in the trim old garden, soaring skyward till the eyes that follow grow dizzy, the trees that were green and luxuriant years before the world was redeemed. So, through Mantua and Bologna down to Florence, where, I think, the spirits of Catherine and of Cosmo linger yet;—the women and the men are all so soft-toned, and silky, and sinful, and cruel. We did not stay long there, for we had all visited it before, once or twice, but kept on our way, by the upper road to Rome, till we reached our last halting-place—Civita Castellana.

We were gathered round the wood-fire after dinner (for the October evenings grew chilly as they closed in); I don't know how it was that Forrester began telling us about their flight.

'You ought to have seen Bella's baggage,' he said at last; 'it was so compact. You can't fancy anything so tiny as the *sac-de-nuit*. A courier's money-bag would make two of it. Then a vast cloak, and that's all. Quite in light marching order.'

'I wonder you are not ashamed to talk about baggage,' his wife retorted. 'When we got to Dover, there was his servant with four immense portmanteaus and a dressing-case nearly as large, waiting for us. Was it not romantic?'

'Bah!' Charley said. 'A man must have his comforts, even if he is eloping. I am sure I arranged everything superbly. I don't know how I did it. An undeveloped talent for intrigue, I suppose.'

'Was it not kind of him to take so much trouble?' Isabel asked, quite innocently, and in perfect good faith, I am sure; but her husband pinched the little pink ear that was within his reach.

'She means to be sarcastic,' he said. 'You've spoilt her, Guy. If I had had time to deliberate though, I don't think I should ever have come to the post. I wonder how any one stands the training.'

'I'll tell you what would have suited you exactly,' Livingstone remarked—'to have been one of those men in the Arabian Nights, who wake and find themselves at a strange city's gate, 10,000 leagues from home, to whom there comes up a venerable vizier, saying, "My son, Heaven has blessed me with one daughter, a very pearl of beauty; many have sought her in marriage, but in vain. Your appearance pleases me, and I would have you for my son-in-law."'

'Exactly,' said Forrester. 'I should not have minded turning out somebody else's child eventually—(they all did that, didn't they?)—for such a piece of luck as to be taken in and done for offhand, without the trouble of thinking about it.'

Instead of looking vexed, Isabel laughed merrily, and her eyes glittered as they rested on him, full of a proud loving happiness.

'The best of it was,' Charley went on, 'she was in the most dreadful state of alarm and excitement all the way to Dover; looking out at every station, under the impression that she should see the bridegroom there, "dangling his bonnet and plume." (Though how he was to have got ahead of us, unless he came by electric telegraph, does not appear.) What sport it would have been! I should have liked so to have seen the "laggard in love" once more.'

'He was not quite *that,*' Isabel interrupted, rather mischievously.

'Ah! I dare say you kept him up to the traces,' her husband remarked, languidly. 'You have a talent that way. What "passages," as Varney called them, there must have been, eh, Guy? We won't hear your confession now, Puss. In pity to Mademoiselle Agläe's eyes (which are very fine), if not to your own (which are very useful), I think you had better go to bed. That ferocious vetturino will have us up at unholy hours, and is not to be mitigated.'

We sat talking for a little while after Isabel left us; then Forrester rose and strolled to the window. The flood of light that poured in when he drew the curtain was quite startling, making the three beaked oil lamps look smoky and dim.

'I shall smoke my last cigar *al fresco,*' Charley said; 'I suppose it's the correct thing to do, with such a moon as that. Won't you come, Guy? I must not tempt you out into the night air, Hammond.'

'Not to-night,' Livingstone answered. 'I am not in the humour for admiring anything. I should be rather in your way.'

One of his gloomy fits was coming over him, at which times he always chose to be alone.

'Well, I shall go and consume the "humble, but not wholly heart-broken weed of every-day life," as Tyrrel used to say—(Don't you remember his double-barrelled adjectives?) If you hear any one singing *very* sweetly, don't be alarmed; you'll know it's the harmless lunatic who now addresses you; the fit won't last more than an hour. We shall be in Rome to-morrow. The only thing on my mind now is, whether I shall find anything there to carry me across the Campagna. K—— has a very fair pack, I understand, and no end of foxes.'

Have you ever watched the completion of a photograph, when the nitrate of silver (or whatever the last lotion may be) is applied? First, one feature comes out, that you may indulgently mistake for a tree or a gable-end, or a mountain-top; then another, till the whole picture stands out in clear brilliant relief.

Just so, when I recall that scene—little heed as I took at the time of them—every gesture, and look, and tone of Forrester's becomes as distinct as if he stood in the body, before me now. I can see him standing in the shadow of the doorway, the red glare from the blazing wood with which he was lighting his cigar falling over his delicate features and bright chestnut hair—I can hear his kind soft voice as he speaks these last two words—'*Al rivederci.*'

Whether that wish will be accomplished hereafter, God alone can tell: if so, it must be beyond the grave. In life we never saw him any more.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

> But time at length makes all things even.
> And if we do but bide the hour,
> There never yet was human power
> That could evade, if unforgiven,
> The patient search and vigil long
> Of him who treasures up a wrong.

THREE-QUARTERS of an hour later, Guy was sitting in his room, gazing at the embers on the hearth, in the attitude of moody thought, that of late he was apt to fall into. Suddenly there came a timid knock at his door. When he opened it, his cousin stood on the threshold — ghost-like, against the background of darkness, with her white dressing-gown, pale cheeks, and long hair unbound.

'Guy, don't be angry,' she said; 'it's very foolish of me, I know; but Charley has not come in yet, and, just now, I am certain there was a shot quite near. Agläe heard nothing, but I did. You know he always carries a pistol. I made him do so. It is nothing, I am sure; but I am so frightened. If you would——'

She tried to smile; but that ghastly look of terror that he had seen once before, long ago, in the library at Kerton Manor, again swept over, and possessed all her face, like a white chill mist.

'Don't be absurd, you silly child,' Guy said, kindly. 'Of course I'll go out directly, and bring him in in five minutes, to laugh at you. Now go back to your room; there's nothing on earth to be alarmed about.'

But the instant she had gone, I heard his voice quick and stern, 'Frank, come here.' There was a door of communication between our rooms, and, though it was closed, I had caught some words of this conversation, so I was ready nearly as soon as he. Guy only stayed to take a short lance-wood club, headed with a spiked steel head, which was his constant travelling companion—a very simple weapon, but deadly in his hands as the axe of Richard the King—and then we sallied out, taking our servants and some other men that were below, with torches, in case the moon should fail us unexpectedly.

Twice, three times, when we had gone a short distance, Livingstone shouted Forrester's name. His powerful voice rang far through the ravines, and struck against the rocks, rolling and reverberating in their hollows, like a blast fired in a deep mine; but no answer came.

I looked at my companion very nervously; he never spoke, but I saw him gnaw his under-lip till the blood ran down.

We had gone a hundred paces or so further along a narrow path outside the town. On our right the cliff fell almost abruptly towards the river. Guy was a few paces in front; when suddenly there broke from his lips such a sound as I have never heard from those of any mortal before or since.

It is impossible to describe it. It was utterly involuntary, as if some spirit had spoken within the man—a cry of horror and of unspeakable wrath, such as might have burst from the chest of one of the old-world giants, when the rock fell from heaven that crushed him like a worm. The Italians, used to every tone that can express passion, shrunk and cowered back in terror.

Our eyes all followed the direction of his, that were staring down upon a flat open space, clear from brushwood, down in the hollow on our right. Our search was ended, and we knew it. The moon that flickered and quivered elsewhere through bough and brake, settled there steadily on a single white spot.

In all the world there is but one object on which She can cast so ghastly a reflection—a dead man's face.

Guy recovered himself first, and plunged recklessly down the cliff side; when we reached him, he was supporting on his knee the head of poor Charley Forrester, stone-dead, and foully murdered.

The first glance told how unavailing all human aid must be. One small deep wound just above the left temple must have been fatal instantly. Close by his side lay the instrument of the slaughter—a thin, triangular piece of granite—and, ten paces off—his pistol, one barrel discharged. His watch and (as we afterwards found) his purse were gone; but an emerald ring of great value was still untouched on his finger.

I staggered back, heart-sick and faint. When I recovered, I saw dimly the group of men awe-stricken and whispering, and Guy still gazing down at the face that rested on his knee, as if it fascinated his eyes. I could not bear to look upon the piteous sight. All through the bright hair the dark blood had soaked, and a slow stream was stealing through it still; the fair features were all defaced and deformed with the wrath and agony of the last mortal struggle. Yet I do remember that, if any one definite expression still lingered there, it was bitter contempt and scorn.

'In God's name, sir, what is to be done?' It was Hardy who spoke, poor Forrester's own servant, the only Englishman among our attendants. He was choking, and could hardly gasp out the words.

Livingstone rose slowly, first pillowing the mangled head on a soft tuft of moss, tenderly as if it were conscious still. His nature was such, that no shock, or pain, or sorrow to which humanity is liable, could bend or quell it, so as to deprive him, beyond a brief instant, of self-possession and calmness. It was not insensibility now, and hardly stoicism, but an elasticity of resistance and strength of endurance that, in my own knowledge, have never been matched. In history, or in Indian life, you might find many parallels.

He answered quite steadily, though in a low tone, as if reverencing the presence of the dead.

'There is no hope! It is useless to send for a surgeon. Hardy, you will take all the men whom you can collect, and scour the country. Send to the *sbirri* immediately, they will go with you. There must be traces of the murderer. Frank, will you see that—he—is brought carefully to the house? I will'—he stopped, and drew a long, hard breath—'I will go and break it to Isabel.' His hand, that happened to touch mine as he spoke, was damp and icy cold.

In his life, Guy Livingstone had done and dared more than most men; but he never ventured on anything so thoroughly brave, and valiant, and stronghearted as when he left me, without another word, on that errand. For myself, though weak both in body and nerve, I swear I would rather have gone up the breach at Badajoz with the forlorn hope, than up that bank, with the certainty before me of what awaited him.

Trees overhanging, and high walls on either side, and the change from the bright moonlight, made it so dark just as you approached the Inn, that Guy scarcely saw a white figure crouching down a few paces from the door, till he was close upon it.

He threw his arm round Isabel Forrester's waist before she could pass him. Half his task was done; there was nothing to break to her now. She understood all when she saw him come back alone.

For a few moments there they stood in the dark, no word passing between them; the only sound was her quick panting, as she struggled in his grasp, battling to get free.

'Isabel,' he said, at last, gravely, 'come in; I must speak to you.'

No answer still, but the same desperate struggle to get loose. There was a savage, supernatural power in her writhings that taxed even his gigantic strength to hold her; as it was, he yielded unconsciously to her impulse so as to recede some paces, till they issued out into the moonlight. He could scarcely recognize her features; they were all working and contorted, the lips especially horribly drawn back and tense. She bent her head down at last, and made her teeth meet in the arm that detained her.

Guy never flinched or stirred, but spoke again in the same slow, deliberate tone.

'Isabel, come in. I swear that you shall see him when it is safe. They are bringing him back now.'

She ceased struggling, and stood straight up, shaking all over, straining her eyes forward to the turning in the path where the torches began to gleam.

'Is he not dead, then?' she said, in a strange, harsh voice, utterly unlike her own. Her cousin did not try to delude her; all the stern outline of his face softening in an intense pity told her enough.

Such a scream—weird, long drawn out, and unearthly, such as we fancy the Banshee's—as that which pierced through my very marrow (though I stood three hundred yards away), as if it had been uttered close at my ear, I trust I shall never hear again.

Then followed the contrast of a great stillness; for, as the last accents died away on her lips, Isabel sank down, without a struggle, into a dead swoon.

A sad satisfaction came into Guy's face. 'It is best so,' he muttered; 'I hope she won't wake for an hour,' and he carried her into the house. They were trying to revive her, unsuccessfully, when I reached it with those who bore the corpse on a litter of pine-branches. By Guy's directions it was laid on his own bed; and there the Italian women rendered the last offices to the dead man, weeping and wailing over him, as though he had been a brother or dear friend—only for his rare beauty—even as the Moorish girls mourned over that fair-faced Christian knight, whom they found lying, rolled in blood, by the brook of Alpujarro.

Soon they came to tell Guy that Isabel was recovering from her swoon. She was hardly conscious when he entered the room, and he heard her moaning—'I am so cold, so cold,' shivering all over, though she was warmly wrapped in cloaks and shawls.

The village doctor, a mild, helpless-looking man, was sitting by her bedside; he tried to feel her pulse just then, I suppose to show that he could be of some use; but she shrunk away from him, and beckoned to her cousin to come near. He motioned to the others to leave them alone, and, kneeling down by her, took her hand in his.

'Guy, dear,' she said, 'I know I have been so very wicked and ungrateful to you; but you must not be angry. I have no one left to take care of me but you, now. I will try to be patient; indeed, indeed I will.' Her voice was faint and exhausted, but as gentle as ever.

He held her hand faster, and bent his forehead down upon it.

'You are not wicked—only too weak to bear your sorrow. If I only knew what to do to comfort you! But I am so rough and harsh, even when I mean to be kind. I can say nothing, either. I suppose you ought to submit, but I cannot tell you how; it is a lesson I have never been able to learn.'

'You can do this,' she said. 'Let me go to him. Ah! don't refuse. I will be calm and good; indeed, I will. But I must go,'—she sank her voice into a lower whisper yet—'I have not kissed him to-night.'

There was something so unspeakably piteous in her tone and in her imploring eyes that had grown quite soft again, though no tears had moistened them, that Guy could hardly answer her.

'I did not mean to refuse you, dear,' he said, at last. 'I won't even ask you to wait. If you are not strong enough to walk I will carry you.'

She rose slowly and painfully, as if her limbs were stiff with cold, but she could stand, and walk with his arm round her ; and so these two moved slowly along the deserted passages towards the room where the corpse lay.

There was nothing shocking in its appearance now. All the traces of murder had been washed away, and they had arranged the silky chestnut hair till it concealed the wound, and fell in smooth waves over the white forehead. That sweet calm which will sometimes descend on the face of the dead, even when their end has been violent—the sad *Alpen-gluth* that comes only when the sun has set—was there in all its beauty. Save that the features were somewhat sharper than in life, there was nothing to mar their pure classical outline. It was well, indeed, that Guy held her back two hours ago. If Isabel had looked on them then, I believe she would have gone mad with terror if not with sorrow. It matters much, the expression of a face, when it is sure to mingle in our dreams for many after years.

Guy led her up to the bedside, and left the room as she sank down on her knees. He remained outside the closed door, for he thought she might need help if her strength failed suddenly; and I joined him there.

For some time we heard only the quick stormy sobs, and the kisses showering down ; then came the piteous heart-broken wail that called upon her husband's name; and then, the great gush of tears that saved her.

After that there was a murmur, often broken off but always renewed: we both bowed our heads reverently, for we knew the widow was praying.

She came forth at length, her head buried in her hands; but she could walk to her room unassisted, and allowed them to undress her there, without a word but thanks. Before long Nature would have her way, and she was sleeping quietly.

While we were waiting the return of the men who had gone out in pursuit, Livingstone went alone into the death-chamber. He stayed there some minutes; when he came out his face was paler than ever, and there was a sort of horror in his eyes.

He took my arm and led me into the room, without speaking. 'Do you see that?' he asked, lifting the hair, gently, that fell over the left cheek of the corpse.

Distinctly and lividly marked on the waxen flesh were the five fingers of a man's *open hand.*

'Do you think that was a brigand's work?' he went on, his gripe tightening till I could scarcely bear the pain. 'They always strike with a weapon or with the clenched fist. Shall I tell you whose mark that is?—Bruce's. If he did not murder him himself, he struck him after he was dead.'

'Impossible,' I said; 'how could he?—He has never——'

Livingstone cast my arm loose somewhat impatiently. 'We shall know all some day,' he growled, his whole face black with passion. I am convinced of it. If he's on earth I'll find him ; and when I do, if I show him mercy or let him go——' The imprecation that followed was not less solemn and terrible because it was muttered to his own heart.

'We must never let Isabel guess the truth,' he said, when he became calmer. 'It would be worse than all. She would always think she had caused this ; and she has enough to bear up against already, God help her!'

Soon Agläe came to tell us that her mistress was asleep. The Frenchwoman's first impulse had been to be hysterical and helpless ; it was only her terror of Guy prevailing over all others that made her, as she was—very useful.

He went to the door for an instant, and looked at Isabel. Dreamland was kinder and pleasanter to her than real life, poor child! for there was a smile on her lips that, when she was waking, would be long in visiting them. How would ships or men ever last out, if there were not some harbours of refuge to rest in before going out into the wild weather again? Truly she had won hers for the moment : it looked as if an angel had come down to smooth, this time, instead of troubling the waters.

The pursuers came back empty-handed ; they had not come upon the faintest trace, nor could they hear of any suspicious character having been seen in the neighbourhood.

Guy betrayed no impatience when he heard this; but he went out himself with some of the best men, and spent the rest of the night and all the following morning on the quest. All to no purpose. He returned about noon, with his companions quite fagged out; but fatigue and sleeplessness seemed to have no grasp upon his frame.

Isabel was up, and had been asking for him several times. When he saw her, she offered no opposition to his wish to go on straight to Rome the next day. Neither then nor at any future time did she ever ask for any particulars of her husband's death.

Her old child-like dependence and trust in her cousin had come back, and all through the journey she was quite tranquil. It is true, we hardly ever saw her face, for her veil was closely drawn. Her grief was not the less painful to witness because it was so little demonstrative. Very old and very young women, in the plenitude of their benevolence, are good enough to sympathize with any tale of woe, however absurdly exaggerated; but men, I think, are most moved by the simple and quiet sorrows. We smile at the critical point of a spasmodic tragedy, complacently as the Lucretian philosopher looking down from the cliff on the wild sea; we yawn over the wailings of Werter and Raphael; but we ponder gravely over the last chapters of the *Heir of Redclyffe;* and feel a curious sensation in the throat—perhaps the slightest dimness of vision—

when we read in *The Newcomes,* how that noble old soldier crowned the chivalry of a stainless life, dying in the Grey Brother's gown.

There were many at Rome who had known Forrester and loved him well, and all these followed him to his grave. I do not think he had an enemy on earth except the man who slew him.

What are the qualifications of a General Favourite? Good looks, good birth, good humour, and good assurance, will do much; but the want of one or more of these will not invalidate the election, nor the union of all four insure it. It must be very pleasant to serve in the *compagnie d'élite.* They have privileges to which the Line may not aspire. It does not much matter what they do. Their victories make them no enemies, and their defeats raise them up hosts of sympathizers and apologists. When they err gravely, if you hint at the misdemeanor, a 'true believer' looks at you indignantly, not to say contemptuously, and says—'What could you expect? It's only poor ——.' Yes, it is a great gift—Amiability; and when the possessor dies, it is profoundly true that better men might be better spared.

Very soon, Raymond came to take his daughter back to England. That calm old calculating machine was more deranged and shocked by the catastrophe than I should have thought it possible he would have been by any earthly disaster. He was getting older now, and more broken, it is true; and so, perhaps, was more accessible to the weakness of sympathy. At all events, nothing could be kinder and more considerate than his conduct to Isabel.

Guy and I still lingered on in Rome. He was untiring in his researches, but quite unsuccessful. Yet it was not that the police were remiss, or the country-people inclined to shield the murderer. The best of them would have sold his own father to the guillotine for half the reward offered by Livingstone; for he lavished as much gold in trying to clear up that crime, as in old days the Cenci or Colonna did to smother theirs. At length we were forced to give it up, and returned home in the *Petrel.* I own I despaired of ever being more successful; but my companion evidently had not done so; for I heard him, more than once, mutter to himself, in the same low determined tone, 'If he is on earth, I'll find him.'

Immediately on our arrival, Guy went up to Bruce's home in Scotland. He only learnt that the latter had not been there for a long time; but that some months back, Allan Macbane, a sort of steward and old dependent of the family, had left suddenly, summoned, it was supposed, by his master. More the people could not or would not tell.

At his bankers' it was discovered that, immediately after the Forresters' marriage, he had drawn out a very large sum—not in letters of credit, but in bank-notes—

and had not been heard of since. After much trouble we did find out that one of the large notes had been changed at Florence, about the time of the murder; but the description of the person did not answer in the least to that of Bruce or the man who was supposed to be his attendant. All trace stopped there. So the months rolled away. I constantly saw Guy, and sometimes was with him both in town and at Kerton, where Isabel was staying with Lady Catherine. He still appeared to have no doubt of the ultimate result of the search, which, personally or by deputy, he never intermitted for a day.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

He threw
His wrathful hand aloft, and cried Away.
Earth could not hold us both, nor can one heaven
Contain my deadliest enemy and me.

We were sitting in Livingstone's chambers one night in the following March, and dinner was just over, when the Detective was announced, who, for months, had been in Guy's pay and on Bruce's track.

He was a stout, hale man, rather past middle age, with a rosy face, a cheerful moist eye, and full sensual lips; just the proper person to return thanks for 'The Successful Candidates' at an agricultural meeting. Originally of a kindly convivial nature, he had grown familiar with crime till he despised it. The reward set upon the criminal's capture was his only standard of guilt. He took a real pleasure in the chase, I imagine; but had no preference for any game in particular, and was quite indifferent whether the cover he had to draw was a saloon or a cellar. He would hunt a fraudulent bankrupt or a parricide with equal zeal, and, when he had caught him, be just as jocularly affable with the one as with the other. In a drama of life and death, the fierce passions of the actors were only so many gleams of light showing him where the right path lay, for which assistance he thanked them heartily. The foulest mysteries of the sinful human heart touched and shocked him no more than the evidences of disease do the dissecting surgeon: with both it was a simple question of defective organization. The possession of secrets, far less weighty than some that he never told, have made men look worn, and miserable, and grey; but he would pat his corpulent leather pocket-book with a self-sufficient satisfaction, scarcely hinting that the publication of its contents would have caused more devastation in some well-regulated families than the bursting of a ten-inch shell in their front drawing-room.

His lips and eyes wore a smile pleasantly significant, as he entered; and, before he could speak, Guy leapt up, waving his hand high in irrepressible triumph. 'I told you so, Frank. I knew we should find him. Come—come quickly.' He was more excited than I had seen him in the last dozen years.

I exulted too; but I confess a certain repugnance and nervousness mingled with that feeling: it was a new thing to me, to stand face to face with a murderer.

Neither of us gave as much attention as it deserved to the narrative with which the officer favoured us *en route*, of how he had been gradually getting the clue to the fugitive's many doublings and disguises till he came upon his retreat at last. 'They mostly make for home when they're dead-beat,' he remarked, alluding to Bruce's having selected London as his final hiding-place.

We soon reached the spot, one of those dreary by-ways that trend westward out of the Waterloo Road. As we drew up, the outline of a figure revealed itself out of the darkest nook of the dim street, and a man came forward and opened the door of a cab, interchanging a word or two with our companion.

As we got out, the Detective laid his hand on Guy's arm. 'Gently, sir,' he said. 'You must be careful. We've not quite so much proof as I could wish. It would be straining a point to arrest him, as it stands I'd do it though—*for you.* Get him to talk, and don't hurry him; he's safe to commit himself; and we'll nail him at the first word. My comrade says he has not left his bed since yesterday. Perhaps he's ill. All the better. We can frighten him, if we get his man out of the way.

Guy's hand was on the bell before the last words were said, and he rang it sharply. The two officers drew back into the shadow.

In a few moments an old man opened the door, whom we guessed to be Bruce's attendant. He had one of those stubborn rough-hewn faces that even white hair cannot soften, any more than hoar-frost can the outline of a granite crag.

'What's ye're wull?' he drawled out, in the rugged Aberdeen Doric.

'I wish to see Mr. Bruce.'

'No sic a pairson here,' was the reply, accompanied by a vigorous effort to close the door.

A heavy groan proceeding from a room on the ground-floor gave him the lie as he spoke. Guy threw up his head, like a hound breaking from scent to view, and thrust Macbane back violently. The old man staggered and fell; but he clung round Livingstone's knees, as he grovelled, till he was actually trampled down. There was a difficulty in the lock somewhere; but bolt and staple were torn away in an instant by the furious hand that grasped the handle; and so at last we stood in the presence of the man we had sought so long.

Do you remember that hideous picture in Hogarth's 'Two Apprentices,' where the sleeping robber is alarmed by the crash in the chimney? That was exactly Bruce's attitude. He had started into a sitting posture, and was braced up on his hands—his face thrust forward, half covered by the straight unkempt hair. What a face it was! White and flecked with sweat-drops, marbled here and there with livid stains—the lips quivering and working till they twisted themselves sometimes into a ghastly mockery of a smile—the long teeth gleaming more wolfish than ever. The iris of the prominent eyes had grown yellowish, and the whites were bloodshot, so that the light seemed to flash from them *tawnily.*

Bruce had always been very much afraid of Livingstone. His terror had gone on increasing during months of relentless pursuit; it had reached its climax now. Guy stood at the foot of the bed, contemplating the unhappy wretch with a cruel calmness that seemed to drive him wild. He writhed and cowered under the fixed gaze, as if it gave him physical pain.

'What are you here for?' he screamed out at last.

In strong contrast to the shrill strained voice, the answer came slow and stern. 'To arrest Charles Forrester's murderer.'

Then Bruce seemed to lose his head all at once, and began to rave. It is impossible to transcribe the string of protestations, prayers for mercy, and horrible blasphemies: but there was enough of self-betrayal to complete the proof we wanted ten times told. The Detective chuckled more complacently than ever, as he insinuated the handcuffs round Macbane's wrists. Over all Bruce's cries, I remember, the old man's harsh voice made itself heard—'Whisht, whisht, I tell ye, and keep a quiet tongue; they canna harm ye.' The other did not seem to hear him, or to notice his removal by the officers—muttering, as he went, that 'we had driven his master mad, and were killing him.'

Livingstone waited patiently till the outbreak had spent itself, then he said—'Get up, and come with us instantly. You shall finish your night in Newgate.'

The sick man lay back for some moments with his eyes closed, panting and evidently quite exhausted. When he opened his eyes, there was a steadiness in them which surprised us. He spoke, too, quite calmly. 'I do not mean to deny anything, nor to resist, even if I could. I am tired of running away. It is as well over: but I was taken by surprise at first. Guy Livingstone, do you choose to listen to me for five minutes? My head is clear now. I do not know how long that will last; but I do know that, after to-night, I will never speak about Forrester's death one word.'

'Will you tell me how you killed him?' Livingstone asked, controlling his voice wonderfully.

'That is what I wish to do,' Bruce said. I believe he was glad of the opportunity of showing us how much we had misjudged him in thinking him harmless; for a curious sort of grin was hovering about his mouth. Guy, whose eyes were bent down at the moment, did not see it, or the tale would never have been told.

'You know how you were all against me at Kerton,' he began. 'She did not care for me then, perhaps; but I would have been so patient and persevering, that she must have loved me at last—only you never gave me fair play. Ah, do you think, because I was ugly and awkward, I had no chance?'

'No—but because she knew you were a coward,' Guy said.

There was something grand in the utter indifference with which Bruce met the insult.

'You are wrong,' he replied, coolly, 'she did not know it. You all did, and reckoned on my being long-suffering and inoffensive. I saw, at last, what Forrester had done; yet I never guessed but that she would marry me. I trusted to her father and her own fears for keeping her straight. After marriage, I would have tried still, what great love and tenderness could do. I meant—never mind what I meant. It's all over now. I was nearly mad for a week after their flight. Then I became quite cool, and I said—"I will kill him myself." And so I did. Mind, I swear, Allan knew nothing of it till all was done. I thought I should be brave enough for that. Fifty times during the months that I tracked them, always changing my disguise, I nearly caught him alone; but each time I was balked. Wherever they went, I watched under their windows for the chance of his coming out; but I only saw——.'

He gnashed his teeth, and rolled over and over in a paroxysm of jealous recollection. We guessed what he meant. Then he went on—'That night, he sauntered backwards and forwards for some time. I thought he would not go far enough away, and I called to the Devil to help me. He did; for, very soon, Forrester walked straight down the path. I crept after him till he had gone some hundred yards—my heart was beating so quickly that I could hardly breathe—then I ran forward and stood before him. I had taken off the black wig and beard that I always wore, and he knew me directly.

'"Mr Bruce, I believe?" he said, raising his hat, just as if he had met me by appointment.

'"Yes," I said. "I have got you at last, as I wished." I tried to speak as steadily as he had done; but, as the moment for action came near, my d——d cowardice made me stammer.

'"I am not invisible, as a rule," he replied. "You, or any friend of yours, might have found me long ago. You have been some time making up your mind. It's that unfortunate constitutional—caution, I suppose. Well, I'll meet you in Rome: it's more than you deserve."

'"You'll fight me here—now," I said.

'"I shall do nothing half so melodramatic," he answered. "I'll give you a fair chance on the ground; but if you don't move out of my path now, I'll shoot you as I would any other disagreeable ruffian," and he put his hand into his breast, where I knew he carried a pistol.

'I *was* brave then. I sprang in upon him all at once. "You may shoot now, if you like," I said. "I swear I am quite unarmed. But show *that* to your wife when you go back," and I struck him with my open hand.'

(I remembered the mark on the corpse's cheek, and looked at Guy eagerly. I could not see his face, which was hidden by the curtain, but all his lower limbs were shaking and quivering.)

'I thought how it would be,' Bruce went on; 'he drew his hand out with the pistol in it, but he only flung it over the bank—one barrel went off in the fall, then we grappled. After wrestling for a minute or two on the narrow path, we lost our footing and rolled down the rocks; neither quitted his hold, but I fell uppermost and kept him down. He struggled desperately at first; but when he found I was much the stronger, he lay quite still, looking up into my face. I said, "It's my turn at last. Do you think I'll let you off?"

'He did not answer at first. I believe he would not till he had quite recovered his breath; then he said, coolly, "No, I don't. Finish it quickly, if you can, that's all." I would have delayed a little, to enjoy my triumph, but I thought the pistol-shot might bring some one; so I tightened my grip on his throat, and looked round for a weapon. I found none at first, and my purpose actually began to soften when I saw him so helpless; but, as I relaxed my fingers, I heard him whisper to himself, "Poor Bella—we have been very happy—I wish we had had more time—" I got mad again directly. "D—n you!" I cried out, "I'll kill you now, and marry her some day." His old insolent smile came on his lip. "No, you wont," he said; "you don't know how she hates you, and how we have laughed—" he had no time to say more, for I found my weapon then—a stone, triangular and sharp-pointed, like a dagger—and I struck him over the temple with all my force. He gave one convulsive spring that threw me clear of him ; and never stirred again.

'I did not repent when it was done ; I have never repented since ; I do not now. I only thought how best to escape the consequences. I took his watch and purse that brigands might be suspected, and threw them into the river a mile off. I robbed him of one thing more—this ! ' All his haggard face was transfigured with a ghastly triumph as he opened a small leathern case that hung round his neck, and held up before us two locks of hair.

There they were—the love-gift and the death-spoil—the memorials of defeat and of victory, of foiled affection and of gratified hate—the one, beguiled from Isabel by Bruce himself, with many earnest pleadings, in the early days of their engagement ; the other, torn from her husband's temples before they were cold. The long light-brown tress was scarcely more soft and satin-smooth than the chestnut curl ; but one end of the last was matted, and discoloured by a dark rusty stain—the stain that, the Greek poet said, all the rivers of earth flowing in one channel could never wash away—the testimony, to our ears mute enough now, but which perhaps will make itself heard above the Babel of all other cries, at the Day of Judgment.

The two tokens were twined together lovingly, as if they were sensitive and conscious still. Bruce plucked them asunder—'I never can keep them apart,' he said, querulously. Then he put them back into the case separately, and began to mutter to himself many words that I could not distinguish.

'Have you anything more to say?' Livingstone asked. His lips were rigid and compressed like a steel-trap, opening and closing mechanically. As he spoke, he snatched the leathern bag from Bruce's hand and threw it into the fire.

A sharp howl, like a flogged hound's, broke from the sick man as he saw his treasure shrivel up in the flame. Then he began to whimper out all sorts of incoherent supplications; crying, 'that we did not know how much he had suffered before he killed Forrester, and since, too; that he had been cruelly used from the beginning; that he was very, very ill, now; would not we let him die in peace?' The tears were streaming down his face. It was a sight of abasement that sent a shiver through one's veins.

Guy laid his hand on the miserable creature's shoulder. Though he scarcely touched it, I saw the great muscles starting out on his arm like ropes from the intensity of his suppressed emotion; his lower lip trembled, but his tones did not in the least. I can give no idea of their pitiless, deliberate ferocity.

'Listen,' he said. 'I told you before to get up, and come with us—that is my answer now. If you have life enough left to be carried to the gallows-foot, you shall never cheat the hangman.'

Bruce looked up into the speaker's face for some moments. Gradually the agonized appeal in his wild eyes died away into vacancy; an expression, half cunning, half amused, stole over his face; and, leaning gently back, he began pulling threads out of the coverlet, laughing low.

The blood gushed from Guy's clenched hand, as he struck it furiously against the stone mantel.

'By ——' he said, with a fearful oath, 'he has escaped me after all.'

It was so. The mind, worn and strained by the terrors of the long pursuit, perhaps by remorse not acknowledged even to himself, and by the last great effort at self-control, had given way at last—for ever. God had recorded his verdict, and no earthly court could try the criminal again. Bruce is living now (and I dare say will outlive most of us, for his bodily health is perfect), vicious sometimes, but never conscious; hard to please, but easy to manage, so long as his attendant is a man, and a strong one; accessible only to the one emotion which drove him mad—physical fear.

Livingstone called the officers; they came in with Macbane. The old man pretended to be very wroth when he saw his master's state, but, I believe, he rejoiced secretly. The credit of the family, with him, outweighed all considerations of personal attachment, and he would think public disgrace cheaply averted at any price.

On our poor Detective, perhaps, the blow fell heaviest; for, after some time, Guy did come round to my idea, that no punishment we could have brought about would have been so ample and terrible; but Mr Fitchett could not see it in that light at all. Not only was the termination of the affair dreadfully unprofessional, but the little triumph he had anticipated at the trial was spoiled. If human weakness ever could touch this great man, it was when he heard the judge pay a compliment to 'the sagacity and zeal of that most efficient officer.' On such occasions his bow of conscious merit abnegating praise was, I am told, wonderful to see. After a few words of explanation, he glanced wistfully at Bruce, and shook his head, like a broken-hearted Lord Burleigh. Then he unloosed the handcuffs from Macbane's wrists; whistling all the while softly a popular air, lively in itself, with a cadence so plaintive, that it might have been a penitential psalm. No romantic school-girl opening the cage to her pet starling, ever displayed more hesitation and reluctance than Mr Fitchett, setting that grim old bird free.

In truth there was no evidence to attach to the servant, so we left him and his master together. I could not have stood that room much longer. The ceaseless complacent chuckle of the idiot, and his fearful grimaces when he could not make the threads match, had the effect on my chest of a nightmare. Very slowly and silently we walked home through the darkness.

CHAPTER XXXV.

Be the day weary, or never so long,
At length it ringeth to even song.

There is little to chronicle in the events of the next few years. Livingstone resided almost entirely at Kerton. He rode as hard, and distinguished himself in all other field-sports as much as ever; but even in these, his favourite pursuits, he had lost the intense faculty of enjoyment which once seemed a part of his powerful organization.

Do you remember that scene in the Νεκυῖα, where the Eidolon of Achilles comes slowly through the twilight, to meet his old brother-in-arms? Not only are his form and features altered after so ghastly a fashion, that even the wanderer, wave-worn and travel-stained, looks brilliant by comparison; but all his feelings are utterly and strangely changed. Listen. He asks after the father from whom he parted when quite a child; after the son, whom he never saw; but not one word of his fair first love—not one of her who was the passion of his manhood, whom he bucklered once against ten thousand. He had rather hear of Peleus and Neoptolemus, than of Deidamia or Briseis. Of Polyxena, be sure that he remembers nothing, but that he was holding her hand when her brother slew him. Will he ever forgive her that? Not if she could have made amends by the sacrifice of ten lives, instead of that one which she gave, willingly, on Sigæum. Has ambition any hold on him either? Only to breathe the fresh clear air above instead of that murky, heavy atmosphere, he would resign the empire of the Dead, and be a drudge to the veriest boor. Yet once, if we remember right, he chafed fiercely enough at a word of authority uttered by the King of Men. One of his old tastes clings to him still — a very simple one. He has forgotten the savour of Sciote and Chian wine; but—were it only for the sake of the carouses they have had together—Odysseus will not grudge him another draught out of the black trench? It is so long since he tasted blood!

Guy was no more like his former self than the shadow was like the substance of Pelides. He was not languid, but simply apathetic and indifferent; so that one could not help being constantly struck by the contrast between his moral and physical state: the latter was still the perfection of muscular power.

He was everything that was kind to his mother, and to Isabel Forrester, too, who spent much of her time at Kerton, and whose health was very delicate. If Lady Catherine could only have seen him more cheerful, she would have been *too* happy. It was her great delight to try and spoil him, as she used to do when he was a child ; trying to suit his tastes to the minutest shade. For instance, Guy was always finding in his own rooms some new ornament or addition to their comfort. Indifferent as he was to everything, it was good in him that he never failed to remark these instantly. You would not have thought a cold haughty face could light up so brilliantly as his mother's always did when he thanked her. Poor lady ! Those last few years were her Summer of St Martin—not the less pleasant because winter was gathering already on the crests of the whitening hills.

There were a good many guests in the house at times, almost invariably men ; but none of the wild revels of the old days ; very little hard drinking, and no play, to speak of.

One thing was remarkable—the great eagerness Guy displayed to keep the party together at night. He would engage us in arguments, and employ all sorts of ingenious devices to prevent us from going to bed ; so that it became very trying to a weak constitution. I observed this to him one night when the rest had gone.

The slight flush left by the excitement of conversation was vanishing rapidly from his cheeks, and a grey tinge was creeping over them like that which we see on a sick man's, very near his end.

'It is too bad to keep you up, and too selfish,' he said ; 'but I find the nights so long!'

I left him without another word; but I lay long awake, haunted by that haggard face and dreary eyes. I wish I did not see them so often, still, in my dreams.

There were changes in other houses besides Kerton Manor, and a vacancy in the most luxurious set of chambers in the Albany.

Duns, and rheumatic gout, and satiety, had proved too much at last for the patience of Sir Henry Fallowfield. So one night he preached his farewell sermon in the smoking-room of the —— ; in which he was especially severe and witty, on the absurdity and bad taste of a man condescending to suicide under any circumstances. The next morning they found him with —'that across his throat that you had scarcely cared to see.' The hand whose tremor used to make him so savage when he was lifting a glass to his lips, had been strong and steady enough when it shattered the Golden Bowl and cut the Silver Cord asunder.

Whether he was looking death in the face while he uttered those last cynicisms, and calculated on heightening the stage effect of the morrow; or whether a paroxysm of pain drove him mad, as it has done better men—who can tell ? I think and hope the latter was the case, but—I doubt. Though Sir Henry Fallowfield had never read Aristotle, he had studied, all his life, the principles of the *περίπετεια.*

Godfrey Parndon no longer ruled over the Pytchley. He had backed his own opinions and other men's bills once or twice too often; and had retired, temporarily, into private life, till he could 'get his second wind.' The new M. F. H. was his complete contrast—pale-faced, low-voiced, mild-eyed, and melancholy as a Lotus-Eater, one of the class of 'weak-minded but gentlemanly young men' that Tom Craddock used to ask his friends to recommend to him, as pupils. The farmers missed sadly Godfrey's bluff face and stalwart figure at the cover-side; while the 'bruisers' from Leamington, and the 'railers' from Town, hearing no longer his great voice, good-naturedly imperative, adjuring them to 'hold hard, and not spoil their own sport,'—rode over the hounds, rejoicing.

Flora Bellasys was married.

It was just the match I thought she would make. Sir Marmaduke Dorrillon's possessions were vast enough to satisfy any ambition, and his years put love out of the question.

His friends had been as prophetic in their warnings as January's were; but even they never guessed what he would have to endure at the hands of that cruel May. He tried very hard not to be jealous, but he could not help being sensitive; and so, day by day, she inflicted on him the *peine forte et dure*, 'laying on him as much as he could bear, and more.' It was sad to see how the kind old man withered and pined away; yet he never complained, and quarrelled mortally with his best friend for daring to compassionate him.

He was so courteous, and gentle, and chivalrous; so conscious of his own disadvantage in age; so generous in trusting her, and in hoping against hope; so considerate in anticipating all her wishes and whims, that it might have moved even Flora to pity. But her great disappointment had strangely altered and embittered her character. She was *quite* merciless now, and never seemed really amused unless she was doing harm to some one.

It was not that her manner had become harsh or repellant, or even more sarcastic; she was to the full as fascinating as ever; but she was cool and calculating in her caprices. She took pains to make the momentary pleasure as exquisite as possible, that the after suffering might be the more terrible; just like that ingenious Borderer who fed his enemy with all pungent and highly-seasoned dishes, and then left him to die of thirst.

Yet, all the while, her own feelings must have been scarcely enviable. They say that great enchantresses from Medea and Circe downwards, have generally been unhappy in their loves. Either they could not raise the Spirit, or it proved unmanageable; either their affection was not returned, or its object was unfaithful at last. In the single case, where they put their science and their philtres aside, and were womanly, and natural, and sincere; where, to gain or to keep their treasure, they would gladly have broken their wand, they failed utterly, and found they were only half-omnipotent. The justice was retributive, but it was very complete. Be sure, with those passionate natures, the honey of a thousand triumphs never deadened the sting of the one discomfiture. Suitors flocking from every shore and island of the Ægean never made Sappho forget, for one hour, that stubborn impassible Phaon. No wonder such are cruel and unjust to their subjects in after days. Poor innocent Ægeus very often has to do penance for the infidelity of Jason.

I have little more to tell; and that is of the sort that is best told briefly.

The hounds met one morning, not far from Kerton. A three-days' frost had broken up; but it was not out of the ground yet—making the 'take-off' slippery, and the north side of the fences dangerously hard. Livingstone rode the Axeine that day. The chestnut was still his favourite, and the crack hunter of three counties, though he had never lost his habit of pulling.

It was a large, straggling cover that we drew; but the fox went away very soon. From the lower end of the wood a great pasture sloped down; at the bottom of which was a flight of post-and-rails—very high, new, and strong, with a deep cutting on the further side. At one end of this was an open gate, through which the whole field passed.

The hounds were just settling to the scent, when I happened to turn my head, and saw Livingstone coming down at the rails. He had got a bad start, and saw that, by taking them straight in his line, he would gain greatly on the pack, which was turning towards him.

As the Axeine tore down the hill at furious speed, pulling double, it was evident that neither he nor his rider had the remotest idea of refusing.

It was the last fence that either of them ever charged. As the chestnut rose to the leap his hind legs slipped; he chested the rail, which would not break, and turned quite over, crushing Guy beneath him.

I had seen the latter fall a hundred times, without feeling the presentiment that seemed to *tighten* round my heart, as I galloped up to the spot. Many others must have felt the same; for they let the hounds go away without another glance, and some were before me there.

The Axeine lay stone dead, with his neck broken, the huge carcass pressing on the legs of his rider. Guy was quite senseless; his face of a dull ghastly white; there was a deep cut on his forehead; but we all felt we did not see the worst. With great trouble we drew him from under the dead horse. Still we could discover no broken bone, or further external injury. We dashed water over him. In a few minutes he opened his eyes, and seemed to recognize every one directly; for he looked up into the frightened face of the first-whip, who was supporting him, and said—

'You always told me I went too fast at timber, Jack.'

I was sure, then, he was desperately injured. His voice was so weak and changed.

'Where are you hurt, Guy?' some one asked. I could not speak myself.

'I don't know,' he said, looking down in a strange, bewildered way. 'My head and arm pain me; but I feel nothing *below the waist.*'

His lower limbs were not much twisted or distorted; but they bore a horribly inert, dead appearance. There was not even a muscular quiver in them.

I saw the Squire of Brainswick turn his head away, with a shudder and a groan (he loved Guy as his own son), and I heard him mutter—'The *spine!*'

It was so, and Livingstone soon knew it himself. He sighed once, drearily; but not a man there could have commanded his voice as he did, when he said—

'You must carry me home, heavy as I am. My walking days are ended.'

We made the best litter we could of poles and branches; and, I remember, as we bore him past the carcass of the Axeine, he made us stop for an instant, and dropping his hand on the stiff, distorted neck, stroked it softly.

'Good-bye, old horse!' he said. 'It was no fault of yours. How well you always carried me!' He never spoke again, till we reached Kerton Manor.

Isabel Forrester was, fortunately, out; but Lady Catherine met us on the hall-steps. She did not shriek or faint when she saw the horror, which had haunted her for years, fulfilled there to the uttermost. She knelt by her son when we laid him down, and wiped off a spot or two of blood from his forehead, and then kept his hand in hers, kissing it often. We had sent on before to warn the village doctor, and he visited Guy alone in his room.

Powell had been a surgeon's-mate in his youth, and was serving under Collingwood at Trafalgar, when his ship stood first into action, and, like a Sovereign of the old days, led the van of the battle. There was no shape of shattered and maimed humanity with which he had not been familiar; and my last hope died away when I saw him come forth, trembling all over, his rugged features convulsed with grief.

'I saw him born,' the old man sobbed out. 'I never thought to see him die—and die *so!*'

Guy had received a mortal injury in the spine; though how long he might linger none could tell.

There broke from Lady Catherine's white lips one terrible heart-broken cry—'If God would only take me first!' Then her self-control returned, and she went into her son's room, outwardly quite calm.

I have never tried to fancy what passed at the meeting of those two strong hearts, after the one had been brought suddenly, face to face, with an awful death; the other, with a yet more awful sorrow.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

Ah, Sir Launcelot, there thou liest, that never wert matched of earthly hands. Thou wert the fairest person, and the goodliest of any that rode in the press of knights: thou wert the truest to thy sworn brother of any that buckled on the spur; and thou wert the faithfullest of any that have loved *paramours:* most courteous wert thou, and gentle, of all that sate in hall among dames; and thou wert the sternest knight to thy mortal foe that ever laid spear in the rest.

When Powell's self-command gave way so completely, after he saw the nature of Guy's case, it was not because he knew it must end fatally, but because his skill told him what fearful agonies must precede the release. All the surgeons who were called in could do nothing but confirm these forebodings. The colossal strength and vital energy of Livingstone's frame and constitution yielded but slowly to a blow which would have crushed a weaker man instantly. All the outworks were ruined and carried; but Death had still to fight hard before he won the citadel. I cannot go through the details; I will only say that, sometimes, none of us could endure to look upon sufferings which never drew a complaint or a moan from him.

Almost every Pleasure has been discussed and dissected; but we know comparatively nothing of the physiology of Pain. There is no standard by which to measure it, even if the courage and endurance of any mortal man could enable him to analyze his own tortures philosophically. Was it not always supposed that the guillotine is merciful, because quick in annihilation? Look at Wiertz's pictures at Brussels. If his idea (shared, too, now by many clever surgeons) be true, you will see the amount of a long life's suffering exceeded by, what seems to us, a minute's agony. But it is like the Eastern King's gaining the experience of fifty years, by dipping his head for a second in the magic water. For a soul in torment there is no horologe.

Of one thing be sure; the strong temperaments who enjoy greatly, suffer greatly too—those who endure in silence, most of all. I think the wolf's death-pang is sharper than the hare's.

But Guy was not only patient; he was actually more cheerful than I had seen him since Constance died. He liked to see his old friends, and to hear accounts of their sport with hound and gun. To do these justice, there was not one who would not give up, gladly, the best meet of the Pytchley, or the shooting of the best cover in the county, to sit, for half a day, in that sick room. He talked, too, always pleasantly and kindly to his mother and his cousin.

Poor Isabel Forrester was quite broken down by this second blow. Next to her dead husband, I believe, she loved Guy better than any one ; not unnaturally, for he had petted and protected her all her life long. She could not help giving way; though she tried hard, for the sake of others. It was piteous to see her, sitting alone for hours, gazing out on the bleak winter-landscape, while the tears welled slowly from under her heavy eyelids.

Foster, who was still at Kerton, came often to visit Livingstone. No one could do him so much good. The curate was just as confident and uncompromising in the discharge of his office, as he was yielding and diffident when only himself was in question. He was so honest, and straightforward, and true—so free from rant or cant—so strong in his simple theology—that Guy soon trusted him implicitly when he spoke of the Past and of the Future that was so near. The repentance that was begun by Constance's dying bed, was completed, I am sure, on his own.

'Frank,' Guy said, one morning, suddenly, 'I have written to ask Cyril Brandon to come to me. He will be here to-day. It would make me very happy if I could hear him say, he forgave me.'

'Do you think you will succeed ?' I asked, sadly ; for I felt a nervous certainty that the pain the interview must cost him would be unavailing.

'I cannot tell,' he answered, firmly ; 'but Foster says, and I know, that it is my duty to try. You may be present, if you like, on one condition—you must promise, whatever he may say or do, not to interfere by a look or a word.'

I did promise; but I looked forward with dread to Brandon's coming. In an hour's time he was announced.

It was the first time I had seen him; and I was much struck by the mingled expression of suffering and ferocity that sat, like a mask, on his worn dark face. I have seen its like but once—in a dangerous maniac's. He walked straight up to Guy's couch, without noticing me, and stood there silent; glaring down on the sick man with his fiery black eyes.

'It is very good of you to come,' Guy said; 'I scarcely hoped you would. I have wronged you more deeply than any living man; so deeply that I could never have dared to ask your forgiveness if I had not been very near my death. Can you give me your hand? Indeed, indeed, I have repented sorely.'

Brandon's hoarse tones broke in.

'I came, because, years ago—to see this sight, to see you lying there, like a crushed worm—I would have sold my soul. Wronged me? Shall I tell you what you have done? There was only one creature on earth I cared for; that was my sister. All those years in India I had been fancying our meeting. I came back, and found her dying: more than that, I found her love turned away from me. You did *all* this. I tell you, I never could get one of her old fond looks or words from her all the time she was dying. She was only afraid of me. By hell! you stood between us to the last. Do you know that she dragged herself across the room at my knees—mine—who never refused to indulge her in a whim before—first, to be allowed to see you, and then to make me swear not to attempt your life!'

He stopped—gnashing his teeth.

All Guy's features—wan and worn by pain—were lighted up with a tenderness and joy inexpressible, as he heard what his dead love had borne and done for him. He would have hidden his face, had he guessed how its expression would exasperate Cyril's furious temper.

'D—n you!' he howled out, like a madman. 'Do you dare to triumph?' and, tearing off his glove, he struck Livingstone on the cheek with it, a sharp blow.

A great shudder swept through every fibre of the maimed giant's frame, in which sensation lingered still; the blood surged up to his forehead, and ebbed again instantly, leaving even the lips deathly white; he raised his hand quickly, but it was only to warn me back, for—mild and peaceable as I am—I leapt up then, as savage as Cain. With that hand he caught Brandon's wrist. The latter stood with his eyes cast down sullenly—already, I am sure, horror at the act of foul cowardice into which his passion had driven him was creeping over him—he did not try to disengage himself. Had he done so, thrice his strength would not have set him free.

'I thank God, from my heart,' Guy said, very slowly and steadily, 'that, if I meet your sister hereafter, I shall not shrink before her: for, I believe, all I promised her has been kept. Listen—you would feel shame to your life's end, thinking that you had struck a helpless, dying cripple. It is not so. You don't know what you risked. You were within arm's length; and at close quarters I could be dangerous still. Look.'

He took up a small silver cup that lay near, and crushed it flat between his fingers.

There was silence then: only Brandon's breath was heard, drawn hard and irregularly, as if he was trying to throw off a weight from his chest.

Guy looked up at him, and said very gently, holding out his hand, 'Once more, forgive me.'

Cyril answered in a thick smothered voice—

'I will not take your hand. I will never forgive you. But I forgive Constance; for—I understand her now.

He turned on his heel, and left the room without another word: still with his head bent down, as if in thought. I gazed after him till the door shut softly. Then I looked round at Guy. His head had fallen back, and the features looked so drawn in and changed, that I cried out, thinking he was dead. It was only a long, long swoon.

Just another scene, and my tale is told.

I was reading in Guy's room one evening. He had not spoken for some time, and I fancied he was asleep. Suddenly he called to me—

'Frank, come here—nearer. I have several things to say to you, and I feel I must make haste. No—don't call any one. I said farewell to my mother yesterday, and we must spare her all we can.'

In the presence of that sublime self-command, I *dared* not betray my grief by any outward sign. I knelt down by his side silently.

He went on in a voice that, though hollow and often interrupted by failing breath, was perfectly measured and steady.

'You can only be glad that the end has come at last; though it is well I have had time to prepare myself. Am I ready now? I cannot tell. Foster says I ought to hope. I trust it is not wicked to say—I do not *fear*. I have sinned often and deeply; but He who will judge me created me; and He knows how strong the passions of my nature were. He knows, too, how much I have suffered. I do not mean from *this* (he threw his hand towards his crippled limbs with the old gesture of disdain); but from bitterness and loneliness of heart. More than all—I am sure my darling has been pleading for me ever since she died. I will not believe her prayers have been wasted.

'I want to tell you what I have done. You know the direct line of my family ends with me. I am glad it does. The next in succession would be a cousin, who has taken to some trade in Edinburgh. A good man, I believe—but he would not do here. So I have left Kerton to my mother for her life, and then—to you. Hush—the time is too short for objections or thanks; and death-bed gifts show little generosity. Besides, I would have left it to Isabel, only it would be more a trouble to her than anything else. You will take care of everything and everybody. Say farewell for me to my old friends, especially to Mohun. Poor Ralph; he will be sorry—though he will not own it—when he comes back from Bohemia, and finds me gone.'

He raised himself a little, so as to rest his hand on my shoulder, as I knelt, while his voice deepened in its solemn calm.

'Dear Frank—one other word for yourself, who have borne so patiently with my perverse temper since we were boys together. I have been silent, but, indeed, not ungrateful. For all your kind, unselfish thoughts, and words, and deeds—for all the good you would have counselled—for all your efforts to stand between me and wrong-doing—tried friend, true comrade! I thank you now, heartily, and I pray God to bless you always.'

It was only self-control, almost superhuman, that enabled him to speak those words steadily, for the fierce death-throe was possessing him before he ended. Through the awful minutes that followed, not another sound than the hissing breath escaped through his set lips; his face was not once distorted, though the hair and beard clung round it—matted and dank with the sweat of agony. The brave heart and iron nerve ruled the body to the last imperially—supreme over the intensity of torture.

When he opened his eyes, which had been closed all through the protracted death-pang, there was a look of the ancient kindness in them, though they were glazing fast. He found my hand, and grasped it, till I felt the life ebbing back in his fingers. I saw his lips syllable 'Good-bye;' then he leant his head back gently, and—without a sigh or a shiver—the strong man's spirit went forth into The Night.

A sense of utter desolation—as it were a Horror of great Darkness—gathered all around me, as I leant my forehead against the corpse's cheek, sobbing like a helpless child.

You will not care to hear how we all mourned him.

Will you care to hear that—often as his mother visits his grave—there is *one* woman who comes oftener still?

None of us have ever met her; for she comes always at late night, or early morning. But, finding in the depth of winter, or in the bleak spring, the ground about strewed with the choicest of exotic flowers—not carefully arranged, but showered down by a reckless, desperate hand—we know that Flora Dorrillon has been there.

Do not laugh at her too much, for clinging to the one romance of her artificial existence. Remember, while he lived, there was nothing so rare and precious—ay, even to the sacrifice of her own body and soul—that she would not have laid, ungrudgingly, at Guy Livingstone's feet.

THE END.

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